

A N
A P O L O G Y,
AND A
S H I E L D
FOR
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,
In these Times of Instability and Misrepresentation.

FOUR LETTERS

T O

THE REV. MR. NEWTON,

Rector of the United Parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth and
St. Mary Woolchurch :

By a DISSENTING MINISTER.

—Stultus, & improbus hic amor est, dignusque notari.
Cum tua pervideas oculis mala lippus inunctis ;
Cur in amicorum vitiis tam cernis acutum,
Quàm aut Aquila, aut Serpens Epidaurius ? at tibi contra
Evenit, inquirant vitia ut tua rursus & illi. HOR.

Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in
simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but
by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the
world. 2 Cor. i. 12.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made
us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bon-
dage.—A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Gal. v. 1—9.

L O N D O N :
PRINTED FOR C. DILLY.

M.DCC.LXXIV.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IT is hoped that the Rev. Gentleman to whom these Letters are addressed, will not be displeased with his Correspondent, for borrowing so much from his *Apologia*:—he could not more suitably express himself in some particulars—was also willing to manifest at least an equal spirit of moderation, candour, and benevolence, free of the least affectation—but chiefly, it was his desire, that the reader might thus have the advantage of perusing both publications together, and so be the better able to form a right judgment of the persons and things in question. The few

words that may seem to border on severity, were by Mr. Newton first applied to the Dissenting Ministers; in whose room, his own favourite phrase "the awakened Clergy" is now substituted, as being thought rather more pertinent.

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to account for your conduct.

This article was very natural; for, in the present century, few have been the victims from the dissenting ministry to the national establishment, and serious. The greater part of those that have thus separated from one another, were such as (not a doubt now)

LETTER I.

My dear friend and brother,

YOU have now publicly given the reasons which induced you to exercise your ministry as a Clergyman of the Church of England, rather than among the Dissenters, where your first religious connections were formed, and with many of whom you profess still to maintain a cordial friendship. Hitherto, it seems, you contented yourself with assuring them, in general terms, that as the preference you gave to the establishment was the result of serious and impartial enquiry, so you had never seen reason to repent of it, no not for a minute, since the day of your ordination. A more particular account you thought to be neces-

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sary,

fary, as some persons had expressed a surprise at your choice, and were at a loss to account for your conduct.

This surprise was very natural; for, in the present century, few have been the *converts* from the dissenting ministry to the national establishment, who were truly respectable, evangelical, and serious. The greater part of those that have thus apparently gone out from us, were such as scarcely could be said to have been ever of us. They were either ignorant of the first principles of that liberty wherewith Christ hath made his disciples free, or could obtain no profitable settlement with us; or, by an unsuitable levity or imprudence of conduct, had lost the favour of their hearers, and all hope of acceptance and success among them;—and so, with the prospect of obtaining episcopal ordination, and a more stable and profitable settlement, they forsook and walked no more with us.

The public reasons assigned by them for their behaviour, usually proved very unsatisfactory even to their new acquaintance; so that the late Bishop Sherlock, when applied
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to for conferring ordination on such, generally replied, "*No*—I do not like *renegades* from the dissenters—if they were good for any thing, they would not come over to us." One certain consequence of a religious dissenter's ordination by a Bishop, is his being more taken notice of, if not making a greater noise, in the world;—but the general reason assigned for the revolt hath been, "There are among the dissenters some usages, if not impositions, which their ministers must submit to, of which there are no traces in the inspired account of the primitive churches; and therefore we had better take the leap once for all, and submit to the subscriptions and impositions in the establishment, which are enjoined by those who have a shew of authority, and are the head of the state."—This reason hath been often satisfactorily *refuted*, but it must be revived and re-revived.—Should there be any usages and impositions among us that are unscriptural, certainly we have fewer than the establishment; and no one among us is obliged to subscribe with his hand the belief of articles, and observance of rites and rules, which his

heart dislikes, and resolves not altogether to observe. Besides, every dissenting congregation hath a power in itself of correcting any abuses or defects, and reducing the church order and government to the exact pattern set forth in the word of God, whenever it pleases, or as occasion requires; but the established church acts on the principles of perfection and infallibility, though they are disclaimed.—What is required and *imposed* must continue from generation to generation, and even you yourself “dare not wish the improvement of your liturgy, though you think it capable of amendment *.”

If the reasons you have now communicated from the press, contain all “the satisfaction that is in your power to give me and other friends †,” we are the more exceedingly confirmed in the good old principles and paths of our pious and conscientious ancestors. But, though greatly disappointed, I trust that a just sense of brotherly candour and affection shall regulate my pen in the answer, and preserve me from that harsh

* p. 21.

† p. 3.

and angry spirit, into which writers upon controversial points are too often betrayed ; and there will be no other spirit or "resentment than is due and suitable on the occasion *."

I confess that, as in this business my conscience is clear in the sight of Him to whom alone I am properly accountable, I could wish still to continue silent rather than trouble the public : but something upon this subject now seems *expedient* ; not so much by way of apology for ourselves, as with a view of obviating prejudices, and preventing, or at least abating, the unhappy effects of a party-spirit, which I fear your letters have already produced, if not so designed. You were not publicly accused, there was not a *whisper* against your integrity or consistency, and above *twenty years* are passed since you left us ; surely then there was no call for a public vindication of yourself. On a careful review of the contents, with the rapid dissemination thereof through the religious world, esteem me not uncharitable for thinking your inten-

* Howe's works, vol. ii. p. 611.

tion appears to have been “to represent the *dissenting ministers*, particularly those of the congregational denomination, as having no just cause of dissent from the national church; as very narrow-minded, inconsistent, and censorious, and as endeavouring to seduce the serious members of the establishment over to their communion, to increase their party:—and, on the other hand, to persuade our *serious friends*, that there is no just ground of separation from you,—that it is altogether immaterial what form of worship and church government they embrace;—and to assure the world, that the best of the dissenters would join your communion, were it not for the insinuations of their ministers, and their not daring to think for themselves.” This appears to be a *candid* as well as *just analysis* of your publication, and I believe it will fully be proved so in the sequel.

You say justly, * there was a time when the Non-conformists groaned under the iron rod of oppression, and were exposed to fines, penalties, and imprisonment, as well as to cruel mockings, and the lawless rage of a rabble,

* p. 4.

for worshipping God according to the light of their consciences. Their non-conformity, Sir, was both the *ostensible* and the *real cause* of the hard treatment they met with. The greater part of the Non-conformist Ministers of that day were truly the light and glory of the land. They were men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, penetrated with a deep sense of the Redeemer's glory and love, and of the worth of souls. Their ministrations were accompanied with unction and power, and they were instrumental in turning many sinners from their evil ways. It is indeed no wonder that the world hated such men ; that snares were spread for their feet, their liberty abridged, and that many said, " Away with them, they are not worthy to live !"

You think it probable, that, "* if these servants of the Most High could have enjoyed that freedom for their persons and assemblies, which is now possessed by those who bear the same name, they would have been well satisfied that the established Church should

* p. 6.

have remained in peaceful possession of its own order and ritual." They might, as *we truly are*; but still fervently praying, that all men would acknowledge the Lord Jesus to be what God hath made him, "head over all things to the church," and, as such, honour and obey him. Therefore, Sir, whatever appears in this correspondence *against your Church order and ritual*, must be considered as forcibly drawn from me;—being absolutely necessary to prove the futility of the reasons you have assigned for your conformity. Several among our forefathers, tis granted, continued to worship occasionally in the Parish Churches, after they had been ejected from them as preachers; and this, from a sacred regard to the Sabbath and public worship, to manifest also their brotherly love, and to prove their loyal attachment to the ungrateful rulers that persecuted them. But things were studiously carried against them with a high hand. The exaction of re-ordination, and the little time allowed for subscribing the book of Common-prayer, which many of the Ministers had not been

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able to procure, or even to see, when the law called for their assent to it, were circumstances which might contribute to swell the *Bartholomew-list*. It was well known to some of the leaders in that unhappy business, of whom several were *Bishops*, that there were among the Non-conformists wise and moderate men, who were not disposed to quit their parochial cures, unless they were constrained by the harshest and most violent measures : such therefore were the measures they adopted.

It is our mercy to live in more quiet times. We are freed from some restraints in religious concerns ; and every person, through the spirit of the times, and equity and good policy of the state, is at liberty to profess, preach, worship, or print as he thinks proper. But it is still to be lamented, that even *now* your dissenting brethren are not in possession of those rights, which, as men and christians, we can justly claim. There are still penal laws to harass and distress the conscientious Non-conformist.

I agree with you, it is to be lamented,
that

that they, who are united upon the same foundations, and agree in the same important leading principles, should lay so much stress upon their circumstantial differences in sentiment, as to prevent the exercise of mutual love and forbearance; and that, instead of labouring in concert within their respective departments to promote the common cause, they should vex and worry each other with needless disputations, and uncharitable censure*. God grant that the *High Church principles*, which formerly produced unjustifiable and oppressive effects, may be now generally exploded, as you hope they are.— You may certainly lay a claim to that moderation, candour, and tenderness from your dissenting brethren, which you exercise towards them. But as we are not the *aggressors*, so you and other clergymen seem no longer content to stand upon the defensive. We wish to join you with heart and hand in supporting and spreading the great truths of the Gospel; and rejoice with you, if God be pleased to give you success. But there

* p. 9.

are those among you, whose persons and general conduct we respect, from whom we do not find equal returns of good-will, because we cannot join with them in the support of a palladium which bears the name of the *established Church* or *Interest*; the heads and rulers of which have too often persecuted our ancestors, and sought to extirpate what you call by the name of the "*Dissenting Interest*." And notwithstanding the peculiarity of this phrase, and the various names, views, and sentiments which obtain among those who form this aggregate, styled the Dissenting Interest, you may truly understand by it little more or less than the interest of the Redeemer's Kingdom.

Many of the most respectable of your Church, clergy and laity, have often in public expressed their grateful acknowledgments to God, that a Dissenting Interest prevailed in the land. The advantages are too obvious, and might be esteemed invidious, to mention. You are well acquainted with the old observation of a good writer, "It is evident, that whatever care
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there is taken for the observation of the Lord's Day, and the frequent preaching in the Churches, is owing to the influence of the Dissenters; for, in the *Laudean times*, strictness in keeping the Lord's Day, and afternoon lectures, were looked upon as marks of Puritanism; and, even more lately, some of the High Church clergy cannot forbear shewing how little they relish either of these. — And were the *Dissenting Interest* to sink, there is too much reason to fear, that the *Interest of Practical Religion* would sink with it to a very low ebb. Great numbers of the clergy, especially in the country, would excuse themselves of the trouble of preaching; and though even now there are complaints of great irregularities among too many of them, they would then be apt to take still greater liberties."

There are with you, as well as among us, those "who depreciate the person and blood of the Saviour, and deny the agency and influence of the Holy Spirit, or the total depravity of fallen man *," notwithstanding

* p. 12.

their *solemn subscriptions* to the contrary. Let us judge them not; but as for those who love, avow, and preach the doctrines, experience, and practice, which both you and I include in our idea of the Gospel, so far I can truly say, though not a Churchman myself, your success is dear to my heart, and hath a share in my daily prayers. And in this I speak the sentiments of many, yea, of all my brethren. We are sorry, therefore, when books are written, like your *Apologia*, or declarations in the solemn occasions of worship unseasonably made, as at your Archdeacon's visitations and the consecration of your Bishops, frequently, which seem not so much designed to confirm your people in their own principles, as to place those who cannot accede to them in an unfavourable light; our *Ministers* especially, who, according to some representations, must be supposed to be not only fanatics and heretics, but to be destitute of learning, of common sense, and of common honesty.

As in writing a letter, especially to a friend,

friend, you think yourself released from that attention to method which you might observe if composing a treatise, indulge me with the same liberty; especially as our readers may rather choose to follow us *page by page*, and examine as they read. You would not have wearied me “in attempting to *justify* every thing that obtains in your way, nor in calling my attention to all the minutiae which might furnish subject for debate.” In declining to do this, you appear fully sensible of the weakness of your cause. Nor is it “*mere trifling* to dispute for or against a surplice or a band, a gown or a cloak, or to enquire whether it be the size or the shape (or I will say the colour) which renders some of these habiliments more or less suitable for a Minister than the others *,” when *these minutiae* are *imposed* on the Ministers of Christ; and however learned, pious, or divinely inspired, without these so very decent and orderly things, they are not suffered, but forbidden to preach the gospel of salvation in any one of the parochial Churches.

* p. 15.

Upon this account, I think it *important*, to mention the minutiae which were so humanely calculated to make us all Christians of this particular mode and garb, or excommunicated separatists ;—and all those persons who judge them to have no warrant in scripture, as you confessedly do, are justified in refusing submission to them, and ought to dispute against their imposition. As “a few strictures upon *establishments* and *liturgies* were not wholly *impertinent* to your design,” they are made *necessary* to me, however averse to the service.

That “national religious establishments under the New Testament dispensation are *neither of express divine appointment, nor formed in all points upon a scriptural plan* *,” you readily admit. And upon this account, Sir, with such views, they cannot be submitted to, without violating the obedience we owe to the Lord Jesus, as sole head and lawgiver of his Church : but this we shall consider hereafter. Now, if your Church establishment is neither of express divine appointment, nor

* p. 15.

formed in all points on a scriptural plan, why attack any of the *constitutions* and *usages* of our congregational Churches, which are indisputably much nearer to the scripture plan? and why cover so many pages, or write a single word, in favour of the expedience of national Churches? Why plead for *this* or *that establishment*, or the administration of one preferably to another? Why speak of the parcelling out a country into certain districts, analogous to what we call parishes, and fixing in each of those districts a person with a ministerial character, who by his office is engaged to promote the good of souls within the limits of his own boundary? And why speak of the number of parishes as 10,000 in England and Wales?

You know, that numbers of the parishes are far too large for *one man* to take the oversight of as a Pastor, let the good of souls be ever so near his heart.—And who hath the fixing in each of those districts the person with a ministerial character?—Brother, doth not the answer to this question cut us to the heart, and make our
very

very souls to bleed? *One person* hath the nomination of a Minister for a whole parish, to promote the good of a considerable number of souls! And how is this power often used? What a hazard, whether the presenter or patron is a man fearing God, and loving his Church—or the person presented knows the real value of souls, and will feed the flock of God with knowledge and the bread of life—or whether he will reside in his district, and perform one part of the ministerial office, within the limits of his boundary, a week after his induction,—and whether he or his curate be not *forced* on the people against their opinion and liking, and continued a grievance and burden to them during life.

You have mentioned the truly great Mr. Howe, whose praise is in all the churches, as *one* who, you are persuaded, would not blame you for conforming, though he could not in conscience do it himself. Hear him a little on this point of parochial districts *: “I must for my part say, 1. That I believe it to be the

* Howe's works, vol. ii. p. 624.

judgment of *very few* (Dissenters) that every parish is, *as such*, a true Christian Church. I am sorry I have such a ground to fear it of one kind, *viz.* that some may not be so, as not having among them any tolerable understanding of the most confessedly fundamental principles of the Christian religion. What say you to such, where the Minister is grossly ignorant of the principles of religion, or habitually vicious and of a profligate life? Do mere orders make him a Minister, who (perhaps since he received them) is become destitute of the most essential qualifications? any more than the habit, a *Monk*? or a beard, a *Philosopher*? Can a *Mercury* be made of *every log*?

2. And surely a Church may be *unfit* to be communicated with, although it be a *true Church*. These words of Dr. Stillingfleet himself (Dean of Canterbury) carry their own light with them to this purpose: "As a man may be truly and really a man, though he have the plague upon him, and for that reason be fit to be avoided by all that wish well to themselves." 'Tis true there are

vastly different degrees of that unfitness : but I see not how *they* can apprehend there is *that fitness* which is simply necessary, who judge there are conditions of communion *imposed* that are sinful. And I believe this reverend author (the Dean) will think it possible, a *true Church* may impose some sinful conditions of her communion ; in which case, he hath determined a non-communication with her “ *necessary and unavoidable.*”

I hope, Sir, this is, as you say, both *ad rem* and *ad hominem*. But let us suppose that every Minister, in all the parishes of England and Wales, was learned, conscientious, and pious, and would promote the good of souls within his limits. In some populous or extensive parishes, not half the people could have seats in the churches for worship, and many might live at too great a distance to be able often or regularly to attend.—In this case, here would be numbers without a pastor, and their souls unprovided for by a parochial ministry, and a national establishment. Surely good men should not be offended that multitudes do, in this distress, relieve themselves by resorting to other places

of worship ; rather they should rejoice that the *dissenting interest* hath provided such places of worship for them, and that thousands are furnished with pastors after God's own heart, who would otherwise be ignorant and wretched in a spiritual respect, and an easy prey to the Enemy of Souls.

This leads to another remarkable paragraph.—“Let us for a moment suppose the establishment, with all its provisions, removed and annihilated,” as you desire I should *. In this case, I cannot think, with you, that about nine tenths of the kingdom would be deprived, at a stroke, of the very form of public religion, and reduced in a short time to a state little better than Heathenism †.

You seem to forget, Sir, or put out of the question, God's faithfulness to his Ministers and people, and his constant presence with them.—And what think you of the power and government of Christ in the world, and his love and compassion to sinners ? He will take care of his own cause and interest, and furnish sufficient means and instruments for calling in his elect, without

* p. 18.

† p. 19.

man's unhallowed endeavours, or the civil magistrate's influence, or the state's endowments. Had our Lord and his apostles, who esteemed not their lives dear unto them to promote the good of souls, thought parochial, diocesan, and metropolitan districts necessary, or even important and useful, judge you whether they would not have given at least *one instruction* or command concerning them.

Was not Christianity prosperous, and did not public worship prevail among its professors for above 300 years, without any establishment — nay, opposed by all the civil and religious establishments in the world? And when the several established Churches, in different nations, had corrupted the pure religion of Jesus under the influence of princes *, still the Church of Christ had

* “The accession of wealth and power to the Christian profession, proved greatly detrimental to the faith, discipline, and manners of the Churches; so that, after the Emperors publicly espoused the cause of Christ, the power and beauty of the Gospel was gradually eclipsed.”

Newton's Review of Ecclesiastical History.

its faithful members, who lived in *non-conformity* to them, and maintained the forms of public religion according to the Gospel, in the face of many afflictions, penalties, and deaths *. And doth not Judaism still exist, though that national and religious polity hath been so long abolished, and its professors so generally frowned upon and evil treated ? Is Christianity less efficacious, or less alluring, than Judaism ? Far be it ! The concern, therefore, that you and some of your brethren have manifested about securing the very form of public religion, and keeping us from a state little better than Heathenism, is little more or less than an artifice to give a *false alarm* to the passions of men ; particularly to those who are serious, and wish the prosperity of the Church of Christ, and the salvation of souls. It is no other than making Bishop Warburton's alliance with

* Sixty thousand persons suffered here, on a religious account, between the Restoration of King Charles and the Revolution ; five thousand of whom died in prison,—and millions of property were torn from them.

Church

Church and State both valuable and necessary indeed, and acting a like part with Uzzah, 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7, or with Uzziah King of Judah in his intrusion, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, supposing that the ark, or pure religion, cannot be preserved without the hand of some man or a king to support and manage it—which contradicts the experience of all ages.

“That there is any regard paid to the Lord’s Day through the greater part of the land,—and that the Holy Scriptures are publicly read to thousands, who probably would otherwise know no more of the Bible than they do of the Koran *,”—are good effects of the prevalence of the *Dissenting Interest*, rather than of the *national establishment*. But though I dislike the carnal provisions of human policy, in room of the divine prescriptions; and dislike the numerous festivals and fasts in your Church, making it to appear like “a kingdom consisting in meats and drinks †,” yet I have sometimes rejoiced that your sea-

* p. 20.

† One hundred and forty-nine days, exclusive of the Sundays in the year.

sons of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, are observed among you ; as on these occasions, perhaps, thousands in the island hear more about the person and offices of Christ from their parochial Ministers, than they do all the year besides. Permit me to say, a full and free toleration for all to worship and serve God, as they think his holy word, that *all-sufficient rule*, enjoins, appears to me a much more desirable and promising constitution, than yours clogged with an established form, for enlarging religious knowledge, preserving the rights of conscience, and for promoting the welfare of souls : and thus also an entire end would be put to all hypocrisy, dissimulation, and prevarication, in solemn religious subscriptions, and to simony, by the Ministers of any establishment whatever *.

* “ Simony, a crime highly injurious and reproachful to the gospel of Christ, which no laws or obligations have hitherto been able to suppress.—Our laws have guarded against it by a very solemn and circumstantial oath ; but this oath, if not literally broken, is often scandalously evaded.”

Newton's Review of Eccl. History.

You

You acknowledge that the Church of England hath no higher title than by law established, and that *it claims no higher title†.* Were these my sentiments, I could not, as you, so bless God for it; nor speak so highly of what is a mere human constitution, a creature of the State; much less join myself to it, and become one of its servants and helpers. The same reasons you have assigned for speaking respectfully of the establishment, equally apply to a people's blessing God for the establishment of Jeroboam's two golden calves and worship,—and for the ordinances of Popery, Mahometanism, the Gentoo worship, &c. &c. To these public or national establishments, we may say, is owing the regard paid to their respective sabbaths, and that their Scriptures are publicly read;—and so errors and idolatry have been propagated and continued in the world, to the injury of that religion which is pure and undefiled.

Having proved the inexpediency of parochial order,—and as the sacred oracles are to-

tally silent on the head, all your deductions of the *expediency* of a rubric and liturgy fall to the ground; many pages therefore, on this head, might have been spared. But your observations are so singular and curious, they tempt me to re-peruse them: Your “established Church is certainly *discriminated* from other Churches which are not so established*.” If not formed on the model, it is supported by the power, and shines with the splendors, of this world †. It hath its non-residences, pluralities, dispensations, commendams, fat stalls, dignities, and even palaces and thrones. Its *pastors*, or, strictly speaking, *rulers*, are but twenty-six. These are *Lords*, and seated with the nobles of the land; while, as you justly observe, some of

* p. 21.

† “Promotions in the world are attended with worldly advantages; but such *promotions in the Church, as are agreeable to the spirit of God*, will rather entitle a man to a larger share of labours and sufferings, and the painful pre-eminence of standing in the fore front of the battle, to sustain the hottest brunt of every storm.”

Newton's Review of Eccl. History.

their

their curates are poor enough. But is it right that a Church should be so established, with *this discrimination*? Or can you approve of a labourer performing an office, and doing the whole work, and another enjoying the benefice and receiving the wages? You do not; for even your *liturgy*, you think, is capable of amendment *, and yet “*dare not wish* that the *improvement* of it should be attempted, lest the intended remedy might prove worse than the disease.” You say, you “are not called to *defend it* †.” Surely you are. — Not defend what you so solemnly subscribed as heartily approving, and engaged constantly to use in public worship! — It most certainly highly concerns every serious person to be fully satisfied that every part of the worship he joins in, not to say administers, be true and acceptable to God; and that both the doctrine and spirit of the Church with which he unites, and to which he gives a public countenance, are agreeable to the gospel and spirit of Christ. By your declining to defend the liturgy, we have

* p. 21.

† p. 22.

another

another strong proof of your *feeling* the weakness of your cause. Indeed you would suppose that the objection does not lie so much against *your liturgy* in particular, as in general against the use of liturgies of any kind. But you verily knew, there were numerous objections, solid and very strong objections, against your liturgy, urged even by the *old Non-conformists*, whose memory you so highly revere, and whose conduct you celebrate ;—objections which the ablest advocates for it have never been able to obviate. Your encomiums on the general strain and composition of it, you know, must be equally applicable to the *Romish* liturgy : the chief materials and substance, if not order, are the same, with a few alterations and variations. The exceptionable parts you have prudently kept out of view ; some of them will soon be noticed in a more proper place.

Your supposition, I think, is merely conjectural, though sufficiently disgraceful to your clergy, that if the compilers of your liturgy “ could have expected that all the parish-

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ishes in the kingdom, and from age to age, would be supplied with Ministers competently acquainted with the mysteries of the Gospel, and possessed of the spirit of grace and supplication, they *might have left them under less restraint in conducting public worship* *.”

We have here one frank acknowledgment of a great imperfection in your establishment. To restrain a Minister of Christ (to whom is promised a spirit of grace and supplication, and who, unless he prays in the Holy Ghost, cannot pray acceptably) to the same rotation of phrases and unvaried addresses, yourself being judge, tends to make both Minister and people remiss and sleepy, or inattentive and indevout : not to say, that thus to be the mouth of the people in prayer and thanksgivings to God, is, in your Church, a service that an illiterate or immoral person may perform as well as the most learned and pious. For human authority to restrain a servant of God from exercising the gift of prayer, and imposing on him a stinted form of address in public, seems highly impro-

* P. 23,

per, and hath been given up by many of your clergy, as indefensible. Our Lord hath not prescribed any forms to his disciples, which they should use, and no other ; nor have his apostles,—nor was it their custom thus to pray themselves.—Therefore when any other persons say to you, “ We command you, when met for public worship, to pray always to the Almighty in no other words than what we have been pleased to put together for you,”—I think you might with great propriety reply, “ Jesus we know, and Paul we know, but who are you ?”

If many of the Dissenters do take it for granted, and have found, that a considerable part of your Clergy are not only unable to pray in public, to the edification of their hearers, without a form, but are unfit for the ministerial office in every view *,—surely they are not to be censured for this, as uncharitable. Yourself presume all this to be true, and that the compilers of your liturgy really so expected many of their successors in the Church would be ;—and it is a truth which

* p. 24.

excites lamentation, rather than ridicule or invective, in all who profess a regard to the glory of God, or love to the souls of men. Upon this supposition, however, you think an evangelical liturgy a great blessing; "for they who cannot or do not preach the Gospel, are not likely to pray agreeably to the spirit of the Gospel, if that part of the public service was likewise left to their own management *."

But, Sir, what must "the people, that is the bulk of the nation," think from hence of their liturgy and of their Ministers? While the *prayers* in the reading-desk are evangelical, and recognize all the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel, the sermons in the pulpit often give a very different and *contrary sound*. The sermons declare, that the doctrines contained in the prayers are opposite to reason and Scripture, and destructive of true religion, virtue, and even morality;—and the preachers maintain, that though their liturgy and rubric solemnly pronounced the salvation of all Arians and

* p. 25.

Socinians,

Socinians, as such, to be impossible, and their damnation certain, it was not true ; for they were Arians and Socinians themselves, and held the only true catholic faith. From this fore evil, our dissenting congregations for public worship are delivered ; and, though you may think differently, I think it is a great advantage to them, that their Ministers not being confined to any form of words, there are prayers suitable to all the purposes of devotion, and the different circumstances of the people ; and the same religious sentiments of Christ, and of grace, are to be found in their prayers as in their sermons.

Sir, I believe with you, that God can be worshipped, in spirit and in truth, by those who use a form of prayer ; and that he will afford them, who so approach him, testimonies of his acceptance. If the words of a form suit and express the desires and feelings of my mind, the prayer is as much *my own*, as if I had conceived it upon the spot. I do not condemn forms of prayer ; but must contend against any *one invariable and imposed form*

for public worship. A man's reading it, doth not infer any prayer at all; he may do it with carnal thoughts and a covetous heart; and as "he goes on in a beaten path, that they who hear him can tell with certainty what he will say from the beginning to the end," not varying a single word, you well know that the attention of worshippers also is remiss, their thoughts as well as eyes wandering, and they pray not the same prayer in which others, and their own lips, seem to join. Indeed universal experience evinces, that national forms, and public liturgies, give no energy to prayer.

You acknowledge it to be true, "That a prescribed form precludes the exercise of a gift in prayer, though it in some measure supplies the want of such a gift * : but when *free prayer* is used, as the service is then a reasonable one, so, "blessed be the Lord, there are many living witnesses who can declare, to his praise," that while the use of a form restrained and even *precluded* the exercise of many Christian graces, when they stirred up their

* p. 27.

souls to seek God, the spirit of grace helped their infirmities, and they received also the spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father.— They know, and are sure that their Lord and Master owns and comforts them in what is called extempore and free prayer, though their brethren of the Church of England have hastily *sneered* at and condemned them for it. It is well for us, that He seeth not as man seeth, and is no more a respecter of parties, establishments, or forms, than of persons.

You are rather too hasty in saying, “It cannot be *denied* that the Lord himself appointed forms of prayer and praise to be used in the Old Testament Church *.” The instances you have adduced, as, when the ark set forward, and when it rested,—likewise the solemn benediction which the high-priest was to pronounce upon the people,—and again, at the presenting of the first-fruits,—these may be easily turned against you, without saying, that if these were prescribed forms, and in no wise to be varied from, they

* p. 28.

were enjoined under the Levitical institution, which is now abrogated, and that we live under a dispensation of greater light and liberty. With respect to that summary which our Lord condescended to teach his disciples, *you* believe "it had a peculiar reference to the state in which they were before his passion, and while he was still with them *:" yet, agreeable to the fulness of his wisdom, it is so comprehensive, that almost every part of a believer's intercourse with God in prayer, may be reduced to one or the other of the heads of this prayer. And, with you, I should esteem it a golden hour indeed, one of the happiest seasons I ever enjoyed in prayer, if I could repeat it with a just impression of the meaning of every clause. But alas! such are the effects of our unhappy differences, or rather of a wrongness of spirit in maintaining them, and so prone are we to think we cannot be too unlike those whom we are not pleased with, that even the words which our Lord himself has taught, as a *model* of prayer, are *imposed as a*

* p. 31.

set form, without the sanction of any Scripture to warrant it,—frequently must be repeated also in the same service,—and is so exalted or depreciated, as to be said and sung at least ten times a day in your cathedral worship.

I apprehend your fears are groundless, that “the Lord’s Prayer is depreciated and disused by many of us, upon *no better ground* than because it is retained in the usage of the Church of England*.” I have used, and continue to use it, at times, in our public religious exercises, as do many of my brethren; and I know not one who disuses it, on the ground you have so *candidly* suggested.

You inform us that Christ, “besides giving us a pattern to pray after that manner, has at least permitted us to use it as a form, directing us, *When ye pray*, say, Our Father who art in heaven, &c.” So that if scriptural warrant be required, you think you have one more clear and express for the use of this prayer, than can be found for *some things* upon which *no small stress* is laid by

* p. 32.

your Dissenting brethren *. A spirit of equity and candour would here have led you to mention *the things* ; but now your readers may suppose any thing, and every thing, and no answer can be returned to you. You well know, that the united opinion of your Dissenting brethren, is, that not the *smallest stress* should be laid on any thing unwarranted by Scripture ; and, as to faith and worship, what is not contained in our only rule of faith, the Bible, is to be rejected.

It would be difficult to prove, Sir, that our Lord appointed *his own words* to be a set or precise form for the use of his disciples, as there is a difference in the phraseology of the petitions in Matthew and Luke ;—and much more difficult to prove, that he ordered its use, and the *many repetitions* of it, to be imposed. Though given to the apostles, at their particular request, as a *pattern* or compendium of prayer, and to prevent repetitions,—there is not a single instance of their using it, but many of their using other words in prayer ;—

* P. 33.

and you will observe, *that* which is the most essential part of an acceptable prayer, *asking in the name of Christ*, is not in your supposed set form. Contend as you please for the expediency of a rubric and liturgy, and censure as you please those who cannot in conscience use them,—you know there is not *one* prescribed liturgy in the Bible; that Christ, the sole law-giver to his subjects, instituted none, and never delegated any persons to draw up a liturgy for his Church and people;—you know that even antiquity is against the use of one; for none of the saints of old, or the primitive Christians, were stinted to other men's words:—and I need not tell you, that the Church was awfully corrupt, before any forms were brought forth;—and that the Lord's Prayer itself was never introduced into the stated public service, till the year after Christ 618.—*In fine*, had even our Lord imposed a form of his *own making*, you know better than to assert, this would have been a warrant for any men or rulers whatsoever to *impose their forms*, according

ing to their own devices and will, on the churches of Christ, and on all his ministers, for constant public service.

I was grieved at your unkind insinuations against the Dissenters, as *guilty* of gross inconsistency and perverseness, in not using the liturgy, because of human composition, and yet will use forms of their own devising, and Dr. Watts's Hymns and Imitation of David's Psalms. Sir, is there no difference, or rather, is there not a *vast difference*, between collecting and acquiring by study, application, and communion with God and his word, a good knowledge of the devotional parts of Scripture, "which are in the strain of prayer and praise," and using them in our public addresses as appear most suitable and proper,—and our *reading an imposed form* no way to be varied from, and *singing verses* no way suitable to the purposes of devotion, but adapted only to the peculiar and historical circumstances either of David or the Jews? Many have contended, that the Psalms themselves are destitute of divine authority, even for being a part of the Jewish

worship, and therefore not to be imposed on the disciples of Jesus.

As you have published *hymns of your own composing*, you may think yourself properly entitled to laugh at the extempore hymn-makers*. Your Dissenting brethren do not covet such a talent; nor need they exercise it to maintain your consistency, did they possess it. From the manner of your expressions, you seem, however, to have formerly coveted, if not attempted to exercise, “this *talent of extempore hymn-making* †,” which is the present object of your wit. ’Tis the way of many in the world, to do the very things for which they condemn others; and to censure and despise what they cannot attain to, and would rejoice to have. Such examples are not worthy of our imitation. *Consistency* is praiseworthy; but it strikes me, while on this Subject, that for you to maintain a consistency in your whole service, as a Minister of the Church of England, you can neither sing hymns of your own or any other modern person’s composing; nor so much as

* p. 32.

† p. 39.

one psalm of Dr. Watts's, or even of Bishop Patrick's version, without a *public breach* of the famous Act of Uniformity.

One of your most eminent brethren is, indeed, so zealous to retain the prescribed form of old Sternhold and Hopkins, that he not only reprobates Dr. Watts's poetical version, but all the hymns that are sung in the Methodist chapels, asserting that "God does not bless the singing of *human compositions* in his Church." You know, he considers all *hymn-mongers* (as he styles them) coming very near to the sin of blasphemy; adding *, "They introduce their own verses into the Church, sing them with great delight, and, as they fancy, with great profit, although the whole practice be in direct opposition to the command of God, and therefore *cannot possibly* be accompanied with the blessing of God."—Freedom of speech, and of censure, indeed !

In my subsequent Letters I purpose to examine the reasons which determined your

* Romaine's preface to his collection of Psalms, p. 126.

choice,

choice, and which still satisfy you, that in receiving episcopal ordination, and exercising your ministry in the established Church, you have not acted wrong. At present, I shall relieve your attention, by subscribing myself

Your affectionate Friend,

and Brother.

LETTER

LETTER II.

My dear friend and brother,

AS such I address you, notwithstanding our different views of Church Government. Brotherly love should be confirmed by repeated proofs; and it is the desire of my heart, that nothing may take place on either side, to weaken the exercise of that charity, which, having the faith and hope of the Gospel for its basis, is calculated to subsist and flourish in a better world. With this thought upon my mind, I can join you in saying, "It is impossible that I should write a single line with an intention of grieving or offending you;" and I hope the same consideration on your part will dispose you to a candid perusal of what I offer.

"I had

“I had rather be silent than plead even for truth in an angry, contentious spirit. For every year of my life strengthens my conviction of the importance of that divine aphorism,—‘The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.’” And yet, as is too often the case, amidst the greatest professions of candour and peaceableness, *little charity* is manifested in your Letters.

How far what I have suggested against establishments and liturgies may appear conclusive to you, I know not; but beg you to consider, that what God hath thought *needless* to appoint, men ought not to make, or pretend to be, necessary or important, or even *useful*. What he commands not in his worship, he virtually forbids. In reverence to God, we must exclude all men’s deviations from the divine rule, or we can exclude none at all.—Where shall we draw the line? We know that little deviations in the order and worship of the Church, open the way to greater;—and there is no end of man’s vanity and boldness in multiplying inventions and rites, and then imposing and enforcing

enforcing them by worldly penalties. How many have thought *this* and *that* to be expedient and useful, beyond what God hath said or thought, and got their own devices and modes approved and established.—This, we (as Dissenters) think, is exalting man's wisdom into the place and authority of God; and to add laws and rules for his worship to what he hath prescribed, is like charging him foolishly, and openly saying, that he hath omitted what is needful and proper for the preservation and welfare of his Church. He will uphold and save his people without *human establishments*; and we are for maintaining the sovereignty of Christ on his throne, as the only lawgiver and head of the Church, which he purchased with his blood. The ordinances and laws thereof, and its worship, are to be formed by the *rule* of God's word, and not by the *caprices* of men; and we judge that he accepts no service but what he prescribed, and that we pay the truest reverence to the King of Kings, when we are most strictly obedient to his perfect commands.

We generally ascribe the dissent of those who differ from us, in part at least, to the influence of education, connections, and habit, and prejudices of this kind ; but as it is very natural to think favourably of ourselves, we almost take it for granted that *we* have either escaped or outgrown every bias. Though some of the principles we maintain have been instilled into us from our childhood, and we have been confirmed in what we say is *right*, by the instruction, advice, and example of friends, exactly as others have been confirmed in what we call *wrong*; yet that *constancy*, not positiveness, which in them is the effect of ignorant prejudice, should be in us a very different thing ; a *just attachment to truth*, and the result of impartial examination and full conviction. For my own part, I may not be altogether free from bias and prepossession ; but I desire and endeavour to guard against their influence.

You inform us *, that when the Lord gave you a desire to preach his Gospel, and it became necessary to determine under what

* P. 45.

character you should exercise your ministry, — the question before you was not, What form of Church Government you might propose as the most scriptural, if all parties among us were willing to refer themselves to your decision: but your enquiry was rather directed to this point *, “What would be my path of duty, *rebus sic stantibus*, living as I did in the island of Great Britain, and in that part of it named England.” Such kind of reasoning, Sir, will justify a man’s being a Popish priest in Italy, a Mahometan dervise in Turkey, a Faqueer in India. Having the Scriptures in your hand,—and you say you studied and prized them, and “by the Lords blessing made some advances in knowledge, *though slowly*,” —you ought to have enquired, *what form of Church Government was the most scriptural*, and have embraced no other. You admit that *national religious establishments* are neither of express divine appointment, nor formed in all points upon a scriptural plan †;” and yet you subscribed to one, *ex animo*. Be-

* p. 45.

† p. 15.

Believe me, Brother, it is a hard matter to understand how men that are serious, and convinced of a Church's constitution being unscriptural, and of the fatal tendency of human impositions in the Church of Christ, respecting the highest concerns of the soul, can yet deliberately submit to them.

You seem to have borrowed some Popish principles at that period of life, and acted upon them : pity that you should *argue* upon them now ! as you may cause many to stumble and fall after you, if not encourage others in the same conduct.—Your first connections, of a religious nature, were chiefly with Dissenters; they brought you, “as it were, into a new world* ;” and you confessedly received benefit and pleasure from your intercourse with them : but you *now* charge them with taking a mean or unfair advantage of you †, even while *your heart was warm, and your experience and judgment unformed* ; and by their arts you simply entered with readiness into all their views. Thus, together with the real advantages you ob-

* p. 47.

† Ibid.

tained among them, you imbibed at the same time a strong prejudice against the Established Church, and *hastily concluded*, that it would be impossible to officiate in it as a Minister, without violating your conscience ; and accordingly your first overtures were to the Dissenters *. *First thoughts*, Sir, are generally the best, before evil temptations take place ;—and 'tis not a good sign to leave our first love, and speak evil of our first friends and connections.

You go on to say, had not the providence of God remarkably interposed to prevent it; you should probably have been a *brother* with me in every sense. But your designs were overruled. *A variety of doors*, by which you sought entrance, were *successively shut* against you †. Your readers can hardly collect from your manner of expression (much the same as in your *Narrative*, “My first thought was to join the *Dissenters*, from a presumption that I could not *honestly* make the required subscriptions”) that you really had joined the Dissenters, and *preached* as a Dissenting

* p. 48.

† p. 49.

Minister in their congregations. If your Warwickshire friends or others shut their doors against you, they probably assigned some *reasons* for it. But what is this to your readers' satisfaction, as to the QUESTION before us? Many valuable men have been unpopular and frowned upon in some places, but in others their gifts have been prized and highly esteemed. However, these repeated delays, you say, afforded you more time to think and judge for yourself; and the more you considered the point, the more your *scruples* against conformity gave way. "Reasons increased upon you, to make you think that the providence of God had remarkably interposed to prevent your being a Dissenting Minister, which not only satisfied you that you might *conform* without sin, but that the preference (as to *your own concern*) was plainly on that side: and thus, after several years waiting to know his will, you sought and obtained episcopal ordination *." Though you took this step with a firm persuasion that it was right, it seems

* p. 49.

you did not at that time see *so many reasons* to justify your choice, nor perhaps any *one reason*, in so strong a light as you have since *.

Indeed, Sir, the temptation to conformity is so very weak, setting *our own concern* or temporal interests aside, that a person taking the word of God for his guide, must have a *strong bias* that way, before he can find out one sufficient reason to justify the choice of it *to himself*, much less to his former religious friends. I am not satisfied with this very *interesting part* of your conduct, nor your account of the *motives* which led you to it: however, you now labour in that part of the Lord's vineyard, which you say experience has proved to be most suitable for maintaining your personal peace and comfort, and, you believe likewise, for promoting your usefulness as a Minister †. May it be also with a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men!

All your Dissenting brethren are willing to think as well of the "*awakened Clergy*" as you can possibly wish, and believe you

* p. 50.

† p. 51.

desire to be useful, and we think that in some instances you may be and really are so : and hence the *injudicious* zeal of a few among us in your favour, hath greatly weakened the Dissenting interest. By their running after those who are called “ Gospel Ministers in the establishment,” attending their services in the Church, and extolling them in their pulpits, while their own brethren, who may have been more useful, are left unnoticed ;—by this, they have too openly manifested to their people, as if there was nothing of moment in the debate about conformity ; and have indeed seemed solicitous to bury the *distinction* between our being members of a *national Church*, of which the King and Parliament are the makers, and the *Church of Christ*.

By comparing your solemn subscription with your subsequent conduct, we are staggered. You and other “ awakened clergy” (as you style them *) profess yourselves *real*

* God forbid, this epithet should be used to the exclusion of that vast number of Clergy who have the care of the universities, and of thousands of parochial churches through the kingdom !

and

and *true members* of the Church of England. But were your ministerial conduct examined by the canons, rites, and laws of the Church, I believe you would be found as *absolute Non-conformists* to some rules and rites of the Church as myself; and also practising innovations in the Church, not of its constitution.—Know you not some, who omit certain rules and rites, though they gave their *religious assent* and *consent*, and bound themselves to the use of them? and also introduce others unknown to the Church?—Surely, to *add* to the established rules and modes, is a sin in those that have no authority, as well as wilfully to *depart* from them. We know the Bishop is commanded to punish the violators of the canons, but at present we behold you thankful that he suffers you to transgress, and “*do some things* which have not the sanction of general custom,” with impunity*. Answer me, brother,—Can he be called a *real Member* and a *faithful Minister of the Church of England*, who makes no conscience of encroaching on several, or of disregarding and living

* p. 127..

in wilful disobedience to any of the canons? All your own regular Ministers, of solid judgment, charge several of your awakened Clergy with this, in a variety of particulars: and it were easy for me to instance some things in which they transgress without scruple. There are some in your own knowledge, who can dispense with themselves in various parts of their *required conformity*, to which, by promise and subscription, they religiously obliged themselves. But it seems the *Priests* in the temple may transgress the law, and be blameless, and even rewarded,—while the poor Dissenting Ministers must be reproached and whippèd about, not for transgressing it in the least—being not subject thereto—but for lamenting that it should be so violated, and wishing for a *reformation* both of the law and the breakers thereof. On these accounts, we are loth to deny that the Lord is with you at all: but then, if the Lord be with you indeed, why are you thus? It is unaccountable to us, upon this supposition, how you can remain where you are. We are expecting, from day to day,

that

that if you are enlightened, as you profess ; and honest men, as we wish to find you, you will surely come out from a Church of human constitution, whose rules you disregard in your practice, if not dislike with your heart,—renounce your subjection to ecclesiastical rulers, whom the Primitive Church knew not,—and openly attach yourselves to a Church, of which Christ is the known and sole head. Whether you can persuade your people to follow you or not, we shall then think you have done no more than your duty ; and there is more likelihood of success to your future ministry.

Some among you may have carefully *studied* the subject matter of debate between the establishment and the Dissenters ; and after all their endeavours to obtain information, though they agree with the evangelical Dissenters in their views of the Gospel, may be still constrained to differ on the question of Church Form and Order. What is the reason ? “ Does it require a *sharper eye* to perceive the precise delineation of a Gospel Church in the New Testament, than to apprehend

and embrace what the Scripture teaches concerning the person and characters of the Redeemer, the way of a sinner's acceptance, or the nature of the life of faith * ?” Surely not. The external form of a Gospel Church cannot be more *mysterious* than these doctrines ! There are with you men whose integrity and ingenuoufness are, in every other respect, unimpeachable ; and, without sufficient evidence, you ought not to be charged with prevarication in a business which concerns the honour of the Saviour, and the uprightness of your consciences in his sight ! But do not many of your awakened Clergy charge numbers of their brethren with *prevarication* in their oath and subscription, in a *doctrinal respect*,—and are asking, What can be the powerful motives for such hypocrisy ? Such would do well to consider their own conduct, particularly respecting *episcopal jurisdiction*, and *canonical obedience*.

You have rather taken too much *merit* to yourself in your next particular. Permit me to say, that by joining with, and remaining

in, the establishment, the offence of the cross is ceased: the established Clergy in general, and the Gospel class in particular, find a shelter from *poverty*, and from that *opprobrium* and opposition which might be their lot, if they had the fortitude to unite with the Dissenters *. Here, at least, you are greatly mistaken, in apprehending "the Lord hath assigned to you the post of honour," unless you connect good *rectories*, *pluralities*, *commendams*, and *rich livings*, independent of the people to whom you minister; and are widely mistaken in saying, "that in the treatment you meet with from an unbelieving world, your lot rather resembles that of the *Dissenters of the last century* than of the present †." Alas! what figure of speech call you this? If any suffer shame now, is it indeed for Christ's name-sake? and if any of your brethren have the "*pre-eminence of shame*," may it not be, from being intoxicated with spiritual pride, while they profess to lie low in the dust,—in endea-

* "The religion of the Church of England, is religion de benefice."

JURIEU.

† P. 57.

vouring to make their hearers believe, that they are *men of God* in an extraordinary sense, while they utter such things as are unbecoming both their character and the dignity of the pulpit, make the Scriptures a nose of wax, and so preach as 'tis hardly possible to refrain thinking they designed to play tricks with the sacred oracles, to raise smiles and excite levity, or to provoke a groan, and impose on the blindness and credulity of their votaries. If any episcopal Ministers have the *pre-eminence of shame* now, some of your own Clergy assert, they bring it upon themselves, by their bold invocations and presumptuous petitions, when they depart from their stated forms of prayer,—by their inconsistencies, contradictions, and vociferation in preaching,—by their boastings of themselves,—and by their evil speakings and detraction of other Ministers equally full of wisdom, faith, and the Holy Spirit with themselves ;—and by setting up chapels in other Ministers parishes to make godliness gain, triumphing in their numerous train of followers collected from other flocks,
and

and the tickets which are purchased from them for the sake of hearing their gospel. Do not some plainly manifest, that the leaven of the Pharisees works very strongly in them; and that, with all their assumed heavenly-mindedness, they keep a close eye on the mammon of unrighteousness? Were Dissenting Ministers to do as some of your brethren (that you know) in the affair of Chapels, contrary to the order and constitution of your Church, taking advantage of the serious disposition and weaknesses of their fellow-creatures, what would not be said of them? I think they would justly deserve a pre-eminence of shame—should be branded as *religious swindlers*, avoided, or treated accordingly.

As to *money-matters*, you rightly observe you could name several of your Clergy, who are not plentifully provided for in the establishment *; but this is to the reproach of your Church constitution, or its rulers: and still it is not probable, that if they were to leave you, and to come over to our side,

* p. 58.

“ it

“it might prove considerably to their emolument:” for the youth brought up in our own academies of religion and literature, are *equal* in character and abilities to any that can join us from you * ; and their education, spirit, and conduct are well known by us. The *path of conformity* is the tried way to safety, peace, independence of the people, and fat pastures.

Some of your Ministers, you intimate, shew a cordial and liberal spirit to the Dissenters; and receive them gladly into their houses, and attend occasionally upon their preaching; and even recommend and encourage applications for the support of their Ministers, or places of worship, and are ready to concur with them in every plan for usefulness *. But the number is *very few*—not to be compared with that of the Dissenting Ministers, who have cherished brotherly love towards *your class* in all its branches. And I believe this disposition would be more general, had not experience

* “Converts of *such* characters and abilities,”
p. 58.

† p. 59.

shewn that the candour of some of us, in these respects, has been too often improperly requited by *ungenerous attempts* to prejudice, perplex, and seduce our people, and to weaken our hands; of which the *publication* of your letters is a notable proof. Several Dissenting Ministers have had reason to weep for their close and partial attachments this way, and to mourn over the many sheep of their flock, who have not only been perplexed but frightened also, scattered, fleeced, and at last torn from them. You generally want our people to go the *broad way* to Church: God grant, after entering the *strait gate*, they may advance in the narrow way, the sure path to Heaven!

Be assured, dear Sir, that in thus apologizing for my brethren, I write not only without their desire, but without their knowledge. — They have more reason to complain of *ungenerous attempts* than you, or any of your denomination. They are as moderate, humble, peaceable, disinterested, spiritually-minded, and as zealous for the work of conversion, for the good of souls, and for the glory
of

of God, as the *most famous* among you; and devote themselves as cheerfully and entirely to the fulfilling their ministry which they have received in the Lord. They are for winning souls over to Christ, not to a party; and look beyond this world for their reward.

We now come to your reasons for conforming to the Established Church, and continuing in it.

The first and principal reason you assign is, "*The regard I owe to the honour and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as Head and Lawgiver of his Church **." No reason could be more solid and satisfactory, had you proved your conduct to be really influenced by it.—With the greatest care and attention I perused *all the pages and lines* in which this grand reason of yours was to be made plain to me, but all is *obscurity*; and pardon me if I say, your enlargement on this point is peculiarly singular and wonderful. It appeared exceedingly strange, that the *very reason* which

* p. 61.

makes it necessary for me, and all who know their own principles, to dissent from the Church of England, *in point of conscience*, should engage your conscience to conform to, and continue in it.—Indeed you have greatly qualified the reason, in confessing that the *regard* you owed to the honour and authority of Christ, as head and lawgiver of his Church, *did not oblige you absolutely* to prefer the form of the Church of England to any other form *. How came you to do so then? Is there a medium in ministerial conformity? and what lines are here to be drawn?—Thus the principal reason is *abandoned* in the very page which first proposed it.

Some of your pages, following this first reason for your conformity, are occupied with complaints of professors' mistaken zeal for the honour of Christ, their divisions and parties, and the want of love among them; all *very plausible*.—Then we go on to the imperfect state of those who are even created anew in Christ Jesus: "They have many

* p. 61.

corruptions,

corruptions, and are warped and misguided by the *corrupt influence of self* *.” An *uniformity of judgment* among them, you say, “is not to be expected †.” Pity it is that your Church had not formerly been of the same mind ! and that your present spiritual rulers do not procure the abolition of that *Act for Uniformity*, which is so disgraceful to a Protestant country, and that lays upon you, and all other Ministers of your Church, a yoke which you cannot or will not bear, and at which the world wonders and laughs.

We next come to your acknowledgment : “ I am far from supposing that all the various modes of Church government, under which spiritual worshippers are cast, are *equally* agreeable to the spirit and genius of the Gospel, or equally suited to the purposes of edification ‡.” ’Tis our indispensable duty, then, to choose the best. — We are told, you proved all ; but still the question is, Did you prefer *that* which is most excellent, and most agreeable to the Gospel of Christ ? — He is the Christian that follows Christ fully ! — I have

* p. 70.

† p. 72.

‡ p. 75.

no objection to, but approve of, your candour towards many of the members of the corrupt Church of Rome, and also of the Greek Church, which, as to its external frame, seems to be little less unscriptural than the Church of Rome itself. But what is all this to your *first* and *principal reason* for your own conformity to the Church of England, unless to lead your quondam Dissenting friends to entertain the more favourable thoughts of your joining yourself to a Church not altogether *so corrupt* as those you mentioned. It could not be, I hope, to intimate, that 'tis of little importance to what *nominal Church* we belong, though you say "Jesus hath had, from age to age, a succession of chosen and faithful witnesses, even within the pale of that corrupt Church of Rome *." — You desire, however, to be thankful, that you are not a Papist; and so would have me think you are "at least one step nearer to the true and acceptable worship of God †."

After traversing *twenty pages* to see how your *principal reason* for conformity was

* p. 77.

† p. 79.

proved, and discovering nothing but the above remarkable digressions from the subject, I suspected there was something in you, or in the reason, which, if tried *at once* in a just balance, would be found wanting.—At last, you begin to think yourself in a right track, by examining the different claims of Protestant Churches to the honour they all assume, of expressing the greatest regard to the authority of Christ.—For whatever difference there may be in the merit of their several claims for pre-eminence, the claim itself is made with an equal degree of confidence by them all. — You inform your readers, that, sensible of your own incompetency to decide the point for yourself, you consulted the writings of the best divines of the Church of England. They contended, it was the only resemblance of the primitive apostolical Church, and that it was even *sinful* to separate from it.—You thought “some of their assertions on this head were too strong, and some of their arguments not fully conclusive*.” Your previous attachment to the Dis-

* P. 84.

santerers prevented you from becoming what is called a *High Churchman*; and you did not think yourself authorised to brand those, who dissented from the Church, with the hard names of Schismatics and Fanatics.

Many books likewise came in your way, written by Divines of the Church of Scotland. In their writings you found proofs that they were not inferior in light, holiness, and a sound spiritual judgment, to the most eminent luminaries of your own Church. In what concerned the life and power of religion, you could perceive no considerable difference between them. But in their sentiments upon Church Government they differed very widely. Your English guides would persuade you that the form of the Church, from the Apostles days, was episcopal. Your Scotch guides were rather *more positive* that prelacy was, almost equally with the papacy, a branch and a mark of Antichrist. Both sides appeared confident that they could not be mistaken; and yet their opinions were not only diverse but contradictory.

The suspense in which you was held by

these incompatible claimants, sent you to renew your enquiries amongst your former friends of our denomination. By these you was instructed, that you need not trouble yourself with weighing and comparing the arguments which the *English* and *Scotch Churches* had to offer in favour of their respective constitutions, for they were both equally destitute of any foundation in Scripture *. That you had only to read the New Testament for yourself, and it must appear very plain, that the Lord Christ had not left a concern of this importance undetermined, but had directed his Apostles to leave in their writings a *pattern*, according to which it was his pleasure all his Churches in future ages should be formed. That the first Churches were *congregational* or independent; and that every other plan was unscriptural, and a presumptuous deviation from the declared will of the Lord. And you were also told, I suppose,—and which you *ought* to have added,—that the wisest of men cannot *mend* his rules or laws;—that he hath so settled his worship and ordinances

* p. 89.

as they must stand to the end of the world, Rev. xxii. 18, 19 ;—and to him, in his own house, the Church, if we call him LORD, we *ought* to be subject concerning all the articles, forms, ordinances, officers, and laws thereof ; and he certainly knew when he had appointed enough. These their representations were just ; and it seems they had so much weight with you, as to increase your *embarrassment* *.

Your difficulties grew by consulting different independent writers, who had treated this subject. Though they were of *one mind* in asserting, “ that a plain and satisfactory pattern for this congregational order, might be easily collected and stated from a perusal of the New Testament † :” yet when they came to delineate it according to their own idea, they were not agreed among themselves, as to a few particulars requisite to the constitution and administration of a regularly organised Gospel Church. I wish you had employed more time and attention in this disquisition ; ’tis of *great importance*, and not, as you now think, “ *dry and un-*

* p. 91.

† Ibid.

interesting *." Of the fact you may be confident, that there is such an agreement amongst us, as might be expected; the plan from which we all profess to copy, being clearly and expressly revealed in the New Testament, and which is obligatory upon all Christians. Strange! that you should pretend to *need help* to digest and put together the several regulations which were dispersed in the different parts of the Gospels and Epistles; or that you found yourself unable to frame the materials into one orderly structure by your own skill †." Your spirit was not willing, the heart was previously divided upon the point, and chiefly set on what had long been proved to be a good legal Church.

But this was not the whole of your difficulty; for you thought you saw, that the Independents did not keep closely to their own principles. You met with *usages* in the Churches planted by the Apostles, which did not obtain in any of the congregational Churches you was acquainted with. And on the other hand, you noticed some usages

* p. 92.

† p. 93.

among these, of which you could find *no* traces in the inspired account we have of the Primitive Churches : and, by way of specimen, you mention one instance in each kind, and exult that you could mention several *.

The Apostle Paul, you observe, in ch. xiv. of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, after censuring and correcting some improprieties which had obtained in their public assemblies, gives them this direction : *Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.* The general practice of congregational Churches, in our time, you say, seems not to comply with this apostolic injunction ; because, in our solemn stated worship on the Lord's day, "there is seldom more than *one* speaker." The same Minister who preaches, usually begins and ends the service †." If we plead, that the Apostle here speaks of prophesying, and evidently supposes that the Church of Corinth was favour-

* p. 95.

† p. 96.

ed with extraordinary gifts and revelations which are now ceased, and therefore the rule cannot, in that respect, extend to us; still you have objections.

Though we cannot expect extraordinary revelations, it seems as if you would have a hearer in a public assembly, when his heart has been warmed and impressed with the truths of the Gospel, to ascend the pulpit after the Minister hath ended, “either to *confirm* or *correct* what he had been hearing, or to indulge the liberty he found in his mind, upon some other important subject; as perhaps something was *then revealed to him*, which might have been very suitable to the occasion, and to the state of the congregation *.” This certainly is contrary to the custom of our Churches, and not *allowed* in yours; and I think you must know, could not be justified by the custom of the New Testament Church, and is beside the meaning and injunction of the apostle.

Of this you are suspicious, therefore do not lay your *chief stress* upon it.—Besides, if you really thought this an usage in the *first* Gospel

* p. 98.

Churches, why *join yourself* to a Church where it is impossible for the shadow of it to appear, or the exercise of it would be attended with fines and excommunication,—and why condemn us for neglecting it? But you might have told your readers, that some of the congregational Churches, in their select assemblies, do permit and encourage the brethren to speak from passages of Scripture, and to pray one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted; and if you thought proper to take up the CROSS with us, you might have readily practised *every usage* which you thought obtained in the Churches planted by the Apostles.

But your other argument, and your conduct grounded upon it, are yet more extraordinary and surprising.—You say *, “If it be admitted that, because the Primitive Churches had extraordinary gifts, there are some things in their practice which are not proper for our imitation, who have not the same gifts,—then I quite give up the hope of being able to determine the *exact form of*

* p. 99.

a Church, by *such lights* as the Acts of the Apostles, and their Epistles, afford me; unless some man or set of men be commissioned to draw the line for me, and to shew distinctly how far, and in what instances, the state of the first Christians is limited from being a pattern to us, by the extraordinary dispensations of that age; and how far, and in what cases, their pattern is binding upon us still, notwithstanding those dispensations have long since ceased.

Common sense alone, Sir, with the many helps you enjoyed, is sufficient to draw the line, and fix the pattern, to a willing, unbiassed, sincere enquirer, determined to observe whatever appears to be the will of his God and Redeemer concerning his Church and worship, or any other part of his duty. To be directed to study the Churches, mentioned in the New Testament, as a *model*, and to be told, at the same time, that some parts of their practice were not designed for the imitation of future ages, with distinctly specifying which are and which are not, as judicious writers have done a thousand times, is never the way to perplex

perplex and bewilder an enquirer, as you intimate *, but rather to help him to light, information, and stability. But you hint, that my brethren, whom you consulted, did not distinctly specify which parts of the Primitive Churches practice were, and which were not, designed for our imitation. Ought you not to have sought out others, who were *wiser* or more communicative, or have read for yourself the best expositors of the passages that puzzled you?—But, instead of this, though refusing to trust the assumed infallibility of the Pope, yet “feeling the need of a visible guide,” though fallible, to reside somewhere in the Church, you stumbled at the very threshold of your enquiry, tripped beyond all other Churches, and fell into the Church of England; the guide and supreme governor of which is the King, who certainly hath *more* excellent livings and dignities to bestow on those in his Church, than either Christ or his Apostles enjoyed, or than the Churches they instituted can, or ever will, have to bestow on their greatest favourites here.

* p. 101.

I come

I come next to consider those usages among us, of which you can find no traces in the Scriptures.—What are they? You think “it is the *usual practice*, in our Churches, to require from *all persons* who wish to be admitted into our communion, an account either verbal or written of what is called their experience, in which not only a declaration of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and their purpose by grace to devote themselves to him, is expected, but likewise a recital of *the steps* by which they were led to a knowledge and profession of the Gospel *.” As you are mistaken in the fact, all your subsequent arguments on it are nugatory. There are but few even Independent Churches, and probably there is not one, but what at times admits persons into their communion without it. Wonderful also! that after your long connection with us, you should select *this* as one instance, and the only instance, of which in an hour you might have obtained full information, and thus have silenced what you now throw out as a *reproach* against us.

* p. 101.

A profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of acceptance of him, and submission to him in his offices and characters, supported by the evidence of a Gospel conversation, are deemed *sufficient* by us to entitle a person to Church-membership. If any among us do "*so loudly insist* upon the evil of super-adding any regulations to those which are already provided by our Lord and his Apostles," we are not so inconsistent and foolish as you would represent us to the public, in "making it a *pre-requisite for admission*, that a person shall relate how and when he was awakened, what exercises of mind he has passed through, and other particulars of a like nature *." This is as merely human, as you acknowledge "the *authority* is which prescribes the canons of the established Church †." Neither is it an *usual* practice with us, nor do we think it "to be expedient for young converts, for young persons, especially for *young women*, to be compelled to speak before a public assembly;" nor do we think it "expedient to *trust* to a written

* p. 103.

† Ibid.

experi-

experience *." It surely cannot be contrary to Scripture rules, nor ought it to be a matter of reproach against us, if we be careful to receive only those, who have received Christ Jesus the Lord, and walk in him, and that we wish our members to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,—holding forth the word of life. For want of this, what is the communion of the Church in which you now minister, and what the fellowship of its members? Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? I could say a good deal upon this head, but candour saith, "Spare your friend and let him consider his own words in the note †." It is sufficient for my purpose to add, that our practice of admitting members, and guarding against the intrusion

* p. 104.

† "The Apostles James and John indulged their own corrupt passions, while they supposed they were animated by a zeal for Christ. Are we not often deceived the same way? Can we not silently bear or ingeniously extenuate the faults and mistakes of our own party, while we are all zeal and emotion

trusion of ignorant and wicked persons, can be found in the New Testament. If you had only compared it with the practice of admission into the Church of England, your readers would have pronounced it the most reasonable and prudent, as well as a scriptural practice. As to the charge of young women being *compelled* to speak in and before our public assembly, I have no such custom, nor know I that it obtains in any of the Churches of Christ around me; yet surely our women have as *good a right* to speak in our assemblies as in your Church; where, though there is nothing in Scripture to countenance, but rather to forbid it, they bear a great part constantly in the public worship, and, according to the Rubric, with a loud voice openly confess their sins. To adopt your own words, "My remark on this particular will at least have the force of *argumentum ad hominem* *." to expose, censure, and condemn what is amiss in others" [and even to charge them with what is *not to be found among them.*]

Newton's Review of Eccl. History, p. 30.

* p. 105.

Yon

You have indeed almost wearied me by what you call a *brief account* of the long and intricate road which you travelled, to discover, if you could, the best constituted Church. But several pages more are spent, before we approach to the end of your journey. You seem well acquainted with the phrase *pulveris exigui jactu* : many a defect of reasoning, of argument, and of proof in a cause, have been supplied by scattering dust. It could not be necessary to inform any of your readers, "That a considerable part of the congregational Churches differ from the rest, with respect to the mode and subjects of baptism *," in order to prove, that the reason of your conformity to the Church of England, was your regard to Christ, as head of his Church. But, for peace sake, and to conform to your order and way, I will follow you here also. You lived, it seems, in intimate habits of friendship with several Baptists, who were very willing to assist you in settling your judgment. They urged Scripture precepts and precedents, and said,

* p. 106.

that none of the congregational Churches but their own were agreeable to the mind of Christ: and though you should acknowledge and embrace the congregational order, which undoubtedly was the only one countenanced by Scripture, still you could not be right till you had renounced the baptism you had received in your infancy, and submitted (as they termed it) to baptism by immersion.

But here there was no occasion to acquaint the world with your *fickleness* and versatility of temper at this period of your life,—“that if you had seen it your duty to accede to the Church order of the Independents, you know not but their principles would have led you from them again, to join with the Baptists *. Nor need you have been under the least concern, how they, who, maintaining infant baptism, and press Scripture precedent so strongly upon you, do answer the Antipædo Baptists, who in this point press it as strongly upon themselves. They stand upon the firmest ground, and the arguments of the Antipædo Baptists no

* p. 108.

way affect us. They have not a *single precedent* in Scripture of their manner of dipping the whole body under water *, or of *their subjects* of baptism—the children of Christian parents, whose baptism was delayed till they were of adult years, to make a profession of their faith; and the history of the New Testament extends sixty years after Christ: and they have no *Scripture warrant* to exclude children from the visible Church of God, of which they had been a part from the beginning, and taken into it by his own express command, with an initiating ordinance, at eight days old, and whom he graciously receives into Heaven, and favours not only with a right to the seal of his covenant, but an interest in all the blessings thereof. You yourself was grieved by their attempts to wrest a sense from the Scripture, Acts xix. 2—5, so contrary to its plain and obvious meaning, merely to support a *favourite scheme*; and you found likewise “that the Baptists,

* The most solemn baptisms among the Jews, and of divine appointment, were by *sprinkling*.

thought

though unanimous even against those, who in every point but one agree with them, were divided among themselves *.” Some of the most wise and candid among them, while they practise what *they* think a duty, do not so peremptorily prescribe it to others, as to make it an indispensable term of communion; but will receive a person as a Church-member, whom they judge to be sound in the faith, and of a good conversation, though they consider him in strictness of speech as unbaptized. But others, more rigid and uncharitable, are much hurt by this concession, and bear testimony against it, as unscriptural and wrong. This difference of judgment between them has been thought so important, that the reasons for and against, and their mutual censures of each other, have been laid before the public, by good men on each side of the question; and therefore, Brother, neither you nor I should here spend one moment about it.

I wonder that, upon this state of the case, as given by yourself, you should ask,

* p. 110.

“ What could I do * ? ” You had reviewed and compared the sentiments of a number of respectable writers and Ministers of different names ; and because all in their turns expected you to unite with them, if you had any regard to the authority and honour of the Lord Jesus, as head of the Church, you shook hands with all, turned your back, and left them. You say, “ The very consideration they proposed, restrained me from uniting with any of them † . ” But if you could not think that you should honour the headship and kingly office of Christ, by acknowledging him as the head of a party and sub-division of his people, to the *exclusion* of the rest, as you assert ‡ ,—how came you to join yourself at last to the greatest of all the parties, and which publicly and solemnly avows the chief ruler of the land, whether man or *woman*, to be the head, and supreme governor of their Church. “ Every party uses fair sounding words of liberty § , ” except the party you joined ; which hath indeed articles, rules,

* p. 112. † p. 113. ‡ Ibid. § Ibid.

and canons many, that exprefsly declare (what you would charge upon us) “ they will only give me liberty to think as they think, and to act as they act * ;” and also oblige you to *excommunicate* me, and even all that shall affirm the Book of Common Prayer, or any of the thirty-nine articles, contain any thing erroneous, or repugnant to the word of God.—Canons 4th and 5th.

Sir, you surpris'd me, in connecting together “ the right of thinking for yourself, and of acting according to the dictates of your own conscience,” without which, you think, there is no liberty at all ; and the resolution that you would stand fast in the liberty with which Christ had made you free, and call none of them master,—and then presently subscribing with your hand, to the Bishop, *such impositions* on your faith and conduct in the ministry,—withal boasting of your receiving ordination in the Church of England, with a *πληροφορία*, a full assurance of hope,—or, in your own way of translating it,

* p. 114.

G 3

“ with

“with wind and tide in my favour, and a pleasing disposition of outward events *.”

I have now *closely* followed you in examining your *first* and *principal reason* of leaving the Dissenters, and conforming to the Church of England, — from page 61 to page 117, just one-third of your whole correspondence. The most candid of our readers must say, and you inwardly must approve the saying, That there is not a *single argument* offered in proof, nor a reasonable or *ostensible motive* suggested on behalf thereof. What avails our acknowledging in words, “that Christ is the one infallible, authoritative legislator and governor of his Church, — that he is the Lord, and the only Lord, of conscience, — that nothing inconsistent with his revealed will should be *practised*, and nothing that he hath enjoined be *omitted*, by those who profess allegiance to him †,” if we misconstrue or misapply them, consider them also as of doubtful disputation, and act in opposition to our ac-

* p. 153.

† p. 62.

knowledge?

knowledgment? You declare, "I could no more officiate as a Minister among *any people who insist upon other terms of communion than those which our Lord has appointed*, FAITH and HOLINESS, than I could subscribe to the dogmas of the Council of Trent. My regard to his honour will not allow me to exclude any, whom I believe he has been pleased to receive *."

In the face of this solemn declaration, though all the Churches among the Dissenters own no other head but the Lord Jesus,—and though ninety-nine Churches out of an hundred among them insist upon no other terms of communion than what yourself approve, FAITH and HOLINESS,—you chose to officiate as a Minister among a people, who professedly own an *earthly supreme governor in spiritual concerns*,—whose head and other rulers *insist* on far different terms of communion than those which our Lord hath appointed,—who *require* you to approve of, if not to subscribe and submit to, some things not more justifiable than the dogmas

* p. 116.

of the Council of Trent, particularly the *ordination service* borrowed from the Romish Church,—who oblige you to *receive* all kind of sinners, whom they appoint to a post of profit, and to *exclude* all from the Lord's Supper, even the Apostles, could they come, except they will eat with you in a certain posture of body, and at a certain part of your Church,—and who *force* you to subscribe and pronounce concerning me, and all my brethren, the awful sentence, “*Let them be excommunicated* *.” Surely it cannot be out of regard to Christ's honour, that you exclude from your communion, anathematize, and deliver over to Satan, in appearance, many that, from other parts of your writings, you cannot but believe the great Author and Finisher of our faith hath been pleased to receive, and will bless for ever.

* The *canons* of the Church of England are expressly ordered to be read once every year to the people, by its Ministers.

LETTER

LETTER III.

My dear friend and brother,

I HAVE examined your *chief reason* why you are not a Dissenter. It would have been a sufficient one, had it been really proved, though you could have assigned no other. But the reason, instead of approving, we have seen *condemns* your conformity. However it appears you have *two* or *three* more to offer. Permit me to examine them also; and I hope to shew you, that the preference you have given to the Church of England, is the effect of inconsideration or prejudice, or something else that you have not mentioned.

Your *second reason* for not being a Dissenter is, "*Because I highly value the right of private judgment, and my liberty as a Man*

*and as a Christian *.*" Here we certainly are agreed in principle. I rejoice in the name of a *Protestant Dissenter*, as setting me free from the unscriptural shackles and impositions of men ; and I do sincerely think of you, and your brethren in the establishment, with a degree of friendly pity ; taking it for granted that the engagements you are under, hold you in a painful state of subjection and bondage (the holy Scriptures being our guide and rule) from which I wish to see you released.

According to your present views, you may repay me in kind. As we cannot think exactly alike, this seems the best method we can take †. Harsh censures, and angry disputations, would be unbecoming our profession, and hurtful to our spirits ; but it can do us no harm to pity and pray for each other. I can say, " You would surely pity me if you knew all my inward and outward trials ; but you need not pity me for being a Dissenter, because I account it my great privilege." I am sensible there

* p. 119.

† p. 120.

are snares and difficulties which beset you, and therefore pity you, as you desire. But why pity you, when you say, "That I exercise my ministry in the Church of England, appears to me, as things stand, to be rather a *subject for congratulation* than *compassion*? I cannot become a Dissenter till I am weary of my liberty *." If you please, we will compare notes upon this head.

Let me first speak of the *restraints* you are under. . You acknowledge, you are *bound*, by your subscription, to the forms and rubric of the Common Prayer; but your subscription was really *ex animo* † (from the soul) : you approve the service, and therefore it is no burden to you to use it. Shall I add what immediately follows? "I do not consider it as *faultless*; nor can I *subscribe* to any book of human composition in the *same absolute manner* as I would to the Bible ‡." What kind of subscription, then, can this *ex animo* be? I have often read and heard grievous charges from your Evan-

* p. 121.

† p. 122.

‡ Ibid.

gelical Ministers, against those of your brethren who subscribed articles *ex animo*, which, instead of believing, they opposed and preached against *. “ They subscribed from policy and worldly interest, and for filthy lucre’s sake. They were opposers of Christ, hypocrites, and came into the Church only for the honours and revenues thereof, and to indulge in idleness, sloth, and luxury.” Thus have they been described ; and it is a matter of sore lamentation, that men should, in religious concerns, trifle with

* “ Unjust and disingenuous investives are every day cast upon the main doctrines taught in the articles and homilies of the Church of England, by *not a few* who owe all their distinction and authority to their having *solemnly engaged to defend* them.”

Newton’s Review of Eccl. History, p. 16.

“ It is *too notorious*, that many Ministers on the establishment neither preach nor believe the doctrines of the reformation ; but though they *subscribe* to them, as a *passport to ordination* or to *preferment*, one day, make no scruple to *reprobate* them the next.”—*Narrative of an Ordination at the Countess of Huntingdon’s Chapel.*

their

their subscriptions, whether they regard faith, discipline, or practice; as you understand that they are thus *solemnly engaged* to adhere to, and even defend them.

That numbers in your Church do trifle with their subscriptions, or do not subscribe “really *ex animo*,” — or the Latin words have a new signification now, different from what they had in former days,—all must confess; for we may hear daily some of your Ministers preaching doctrines contrary to the articles of your Church:—and we see others disregarding the rules and constitutions of the Church, in their worship and conduct—acting against their solemn engagements of assenting and consenting to the determinations of the Church, not to say, of defending them. If you will please to inform us, in your next correspondence, what is included in “*a subscription really ex animo*,”—your brethren will be much obliged to you; and you may help them to a better reason for, and defence of, their subscriptions at ordination, than hath yet appeared.

You

You next affirm *, “ By *assenting*, &c. to our Church ritual, I give up less of my own private judgment for the sake of peace, than I should by espousing the rules and practices of any Dissenting Churches I am acquainted with.” You have not explained what you mean, *for the sake of peace* ; but true peace and quietness of mind I take to be infinitely superior to any peace which the world can give us. That our friends may judge whether you have given up *less* of your Christian liberty, and shewn a *higher value* for the right of private judgment, in assenting to your Church ritual, and becoming a Minister in the establishment, than by espousing the rules and practices of any Dissenting Church,—permit me to call to your remembrance, and to set before our readers, some of the canons of your Church, with which but few persons are sufficiently acquainted ; and to which, and the Bishop’s authority, you declare your resolution to submit. “ I would not have applied to the Bishop for ordination, if I had not been previously de-

* p. 122.

terminated to *submit* to his authority, and to the rules of the Church *.”

Now, Sir, by your subscription to the third Canon, you have declared, that all who say, the Church of England is not an *apostolical Church*, ought to be excommunicated.

By the fourth, That all who shall affirm, the Book of Common Prayer contains *any thing* repugnant to the Scriptures.

By the fifth, That all who shall affirm, any of the thirty-nine articles are in *any part* erroneous, or such as may not, with a *good conscience*, be subscribed to.

By the sixth, That all who shall affirm, the present rites and ceremonies of the Church of England ~~by~~ law established, or *such* as being commanded by lawful authority, men who are zealously and godly affected may not, with a *good conscience*, approve and use them, or *subscribe* unto them.

By the seventh, That all who shall affirm, the *government* of the Church of England under the King, by Archbishops, Bishops,

Deans, Archdeacons, and the rest that bear office in the same, is *repugnant* to the word of God.

By the eighth, That all who shall affirm or teach, the form and manner of making and *consecrating* Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, containeth *any thing* that is repugnant to the word of God *.

By the twelfth, That all who shall affirm, it is *lawful* for any sort of Ministers and lay persons to join together and make rules, orders, or constitutions, in causes ecclesiastical, without the King's authority, and shall submit themselves to be governed by them,—ought, for this and the former things in the above canons, “*to be excommunicated*, and not restored but by the Archbishop, after

* The candidate to be ordained must declare, that he trusts he is inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon him the office; and the Bishop invests him with it, saying, “*Receive the Holy Ghost: whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained; in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*”

their

their repentance, and public revocation of such *wicked errors*.

By the fourteenth canon, You and all Ministers are required to observe the orders, rites, and ceremonies, prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, as well in reading the Scriptures, and saying of prayers, and administration of the sacraments, without either *diminishing*, in any respect, or *adding any thing* in the matter or form thereof:—and, by this canon, you are obliged to read the Common Prayer on *all holidays*, and their *eves* also.

By the twenty-ninth canon, You are not to *admit* any parents to dedicate their own children to God in baptism, nor to promise for their education ;—but you are to *exclude them*, and they must get other persons for sureties ;—and these must make no other answer than by the Book of Common Prayer is prescribed ; which is promising more for the child than any can do for themselves :—and you are required not to *admit* any persons as godfather or godmother, unless they have before received the communion.

H

By

By the thirty-sixth canon, it appears that, before you could be received into the ministry, you subscribed — 1st, “ That the King’s Majesty, under God, is the *only supreme governor* of this realm, as well in *all spiritual* or ecclesiastical things or causes, as temporal.—2d, That the Book of Common Prayer, and of ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, containeth in it *nothing* contrary to the word of God, and that it may lawfully so be used, and that you yourself will *use the form* in the said book prescribed, in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, and *none other*.—3d, That you allow the book of articles of religion, agreed upon by the Archbishops, and Bishops, and Clergy, in the convocation 1562, and acknowledge *all* and *every* the articles therein contained, being in number thirty-nine, besides the ratification, to *be agreeable* to the word of God. To these three articles you subscribed ; and for the avoiding *all ambiguities*, you were made to subscribe in this order and form of words : “ *I, J. N. do willingly and ex animo subscribe to these three*

articles above mentioned, and to all things that are contained in them."

By the thirty-eighth canon, If you shall omit to use the Form of Prayer, or *any of the orders or ceremonies* prescribed in the Communion Book, you are to be *suspended*; and if after a month you do not reform and submit yourself, you are to be *excommunicated*; and then, if you do not submit yourself within the space of another month, you are to be *deposed* from the ministry.

By the fifty-eighth canon, You are commanded, in saying the public prayers or ministering the sacraments or other rites of the Church, to wear a *decent and comely surplice*, with sleeves, to be provided at the charge of the parish.

By the fifty-ninth canon, You are to catechise, *every Sunday and holiday*, before evening prayer; and, for half an hour or more, examine and instruct the youth, and ignorant persons of your parish, in the Ten Commandments, the Articles of the Belief, and the Lord's Prayer, and teach them the Catechism set forth in the Book of Common

Prayer. If you neglect your duty herein, you are to be *sharply reprov'd* on the first complaint ; if, after submitting yourself, you willingly offend therein again, you are to be suspended ; and if so the third time, “there being *little hope* that the Minister will be therein reformed, then excommunicated.”

By the sixty-first canon, You are required to take especial care that no person shall be presented to the Bishop, for him to lay his hands upon for confirmation, but such as can render *an account of their faith*, according to the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer.

By the seventy-second canon, You are not to appoint or *keep* any solemn fasts, either publicly or in any private houses, other than such as by public authority shall be appointed, without the licence and direction of the Bishop of the diocese first obtained under his hand or seal, under pain of *suspension* for the first fault, of *excommunication* for the second, and of *deposition* from the ministry for the third. Neither must you, unless thus licensed, presume to appoint or hold *any meetings*

ings for sermons in market towns, or other places, *under the said pains.*

By the seventy-fourth canon, You are directed and restrained, as to your very apparel, what you shall wear, and what not,—at home and in your journeys,—even to your *night-caps*; and you are enjoined not to wear any *light-coloured stockings.*

By the seventy-fifth canon, All playing at dice, cards, or tables, are forbidden to you and your brethren.

By the seventy-sixth, You are not to voluntarily relinquish your office, being ordained, nor use yourself in the course of your life as a *Layman*, on pain of excommunication.

By the hundred-and-second canon, You are to celebrate matrimony, or marry, only in the parish church where one of the parties to be married dwelleth, and in *no other place*, and between the hours of eight and twelve in the forenoon.

Now, Sir, will your *second reason* stand the test of only these canons—"I am a Minister

of the Church of England, and not a Dissenter, because I highly value the right of private judgment, and *my liberty* as a Man and as a Christian?" Are you not under the shackles and impositions of men, who assume offices and power in the Church of Christ, which are not countenanced in the word of God? You consider the terms Elders and Bishops as synonymous*; and the Scriptures know no other Bishops than the Elders or Pastors of single congregations or particular flocks;—and surely the Lord and Head of the Church best knew what *officers*, as well as *canons* or *rules*, were requisite to its good order and edification, and for the perfecting his own body, the Church.

Do not the many engagements you are under, hold you, and numbers beside, in a painful state of subjection? If conscientiously regarded, they must;—and I have heard one of your serious brethren confess ingenuously, "That the observance of several of the *canons*, or canonical obedience altogether, was

* Review of Eccles. History.

impracticable

impracticable:"—and yet others may be heard crying up the canons, rites, and articles of the Church, who at the same time neglect them, and still from the pulpit and the press will rail at us who choose not to be subject to them :—and 'tis well if, to the name of Dissenters, that of *Schismatics* be not added.

Sir, it would be bondage, and grievous indeed to me, as a Man and a Christian, to *assent* and *consent* to the excommunication of so many of my brethren and fellow Christians, who *in point of conscience* differed from me and my Church in judgment,—and be forced publicly to pronounce it against them every year of my life. If, since your conformity, you have imbibed the *spirit* contained in the fourth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and twelfth canons, you must view your dear friend and brother as a person that deserves to be separated from Christ, and *accursed*; or at least as deserving to be debarred from Christian communion,—not worthy to be interred in holy ground when he dies,—and, while living, to be deprived justly of many civil immunities, and if he doth not

submit himself, and recant, within forty days, he may be imprisoned, and lie there till he perish. — All this, you know, is included in the *sentence* of excommunication ; and the Archbishop cannot absolve him, till he repents, and revokes his wicked errors.

The consideration of these particulars brings to recollection another extraordinary passage in your Letter : “ That the visible Church of Christ, taken in the large extent, as comprizing all who call themselves by his name, and who profess to receive his Gospel, is not the *proper subject* of Christ’s government, as he is the King of Saints :— for his kingdom is a *spiritual kingdom*, which none can understand,—and his rule is a *spiritual rule*, which none can receive or obey, until born from above, and made new creatures by the power of his spirit *.” Your design here, seems plainly this, to lead your readers to the persuasion, that ’tis very immaterial what Church they unite themselves with ; but still the greatest freedom is to be enjoyed in yours : and they will enjoy Christ’s spiritual

* p. 64.

government, join which they please.—“As for the unregenerate, they are a mere *caput mortuum*, differenced from the world, which lies in wickedness, in nothing but a name*.”

But surely, Sir, however *little* you may represent and esteem it †, I think the honour of the Lord Jesus Christ is *greatly concerned* with the different ways in which the professors of his Gospel may think proper to constitute themselves into national or particular Churches. God hath fixed a rule of his worship under the New Testament dispensation, as well as the old. We have a sure and standing rule; and certain positive institutions are given, of which he requires his Ministers’ and people’s careful observance; and they who add to them, or substitute another rule of worship and government with *secular penalties*, may be said to invade his prerogative and sovereignty.

If your meaning, in the above passage, is, that the glory of a Gospel ministry and ordinances is spiritual, and peculiarly under

* p. 65.

† p. 66.

the influence and direction of Christ, as King of Saints,—we are agreed. But what shall we then make of your Church's long list of *Archbishops, Diocesan Bishops, Chancellors, Deans, Sub Deans, Rural Deans, Archdeacons, Prebendaries, Canons, Registers, Pracentors, Chanters, Rectors, Vicars, Curates, &c.*? And what can we say of their power and rule? and what of her canons and excommunications?—If the rod and sceptre of Christ be only *spiritual*, you must confess that the rod or sceptre of your Church, in her officers and spiritual courts, is rather *carnal*; *compelling* numbers of what you style the *caput mortuum* (nominal and vicious professors), for the sake of posts under government, to come and partake of her most sacred rites; and *excommunicating* others, who, to preserve a good conscience, dissent (though born again from above, and truly godly)—delivering them over to the secular arm, to chastise and bring them to repentance.

Sir, it was your unreasonable and wonderful

ful boast, of *preserving* your right of *private judgment*, and your *liberty* as a *Man* and a *Christian*, *more* by uniting with the establishment than with any particular Church of Dissenters, that hath of necessity drawn these remarks from me,—in order to my own vindication, as well as to shew the impropriety of the reason you have assigned. I assure you, 'tis a very disagreeable service to mention these imperfections; 'tis with sincere emotions of grief, and ardent wishes for a speedy reformation.—But do not these particulars prove, that your mode of Church worship and government is not so agreeable to the spirit and genius of the Gospel of Christ, as is that of the most exceptionable Church that can be named among the Dissenters? At your ordination, you promised “*reverently to obey* your ordinary and other chief Ministers over you;”—when instituted, you were obliged to *take an oath* to “perform true and canonical obedience to the Bishop and his successors,” and to *kneel* before him while he read the words of institution :

tution :—even your Bishops, at institution, do homage also, by kneeling down before the King in his chair of state.

We now proceed to another point.—Having accepted a designation to the cure of souls, you say *, “ My public Ministry is thereby confined to parish churches ; and I cannot, consistently with what I conceive to be the import of my voluntary engagements, preach at random, and in all places without reserve. But this is no restraint upon my conscience : things in themselves lawful are not always, or to *all persons*, expedient. I approve of parochial order ; and believe it is, on the whole, *best for me* to confine myself to the duties of my own charge, and to such opportunities of preaching in parochial pulpits as may occasionally offer. Between the one and the other I have sufficient employment : and though the Bishop who ordained me laid me under no restrictions, I would not have applied to him for ordination, if I had not been previously determined to *submit* to his authority, and to the

* p. 122.

rules of the Church. I thought and still think it my duty to preserve a consistency of character ; for I was *not ordained* to be an *Apostle* or *Evangelist*,—to spread the Gospel throughout a kingdom,—but to *take care of the particular flock* committed to my charge.” —I heartily approve of your judgment and conduct in this respect ; and wish that all your awakened brethren would seriously attend to the contents of the seventy-second canon, before cited, and to what you have here written ; —and may they think and do likewise !— Permit me to enlarge a little on this *interesting scene* you have presented to public view. You have indeed said, “ I interfere not with the conduct of others *.” — But if with the usages and conduct of *me* and *my brethren*, why not with the usages and conduct of *your own Clergy* ? Their *blemishes* and *disorders* it seems must be hidden, lest the *work of God* should suffer, or be impeded ! But, Sir, we cannot be opposers of the work of God, while we tread in the Apostles steps. What was the conduct of the great Apostle Paul ?

* p. 123.

Was he silent, and would not interfere with the irregularities which took place in his day, that reflected disgrace on the Gospel of Christ, and tended to introduce parties and confusion into the Church? Did he not beseech his brethren to “mark them who cause divisions and offences, and avoid them? for they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words, and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple*.” Disorders in the Church are as dangerous to religion now as in his days, and ’tis as fit they should be courageously and faithfully testified against *now* as *then*. Besides, great is the danger of a neglect, in so important a matter, to ourselves, and to the souls committed to your charge; for if any be beguiled and led astray by means of the Pastor’s silence, is he not chargeable with their sin?—I dare not compare myself with some who *commend* themselves, nor intrude into another man’s province;—yet cannot but think, you are indispensably obliged to discourage and prevent the

* Rom. xvi. 17.

growth of disorders in your own Church; and should frown on those who are authors of confusion, contentions, and separations, and not of peace. You are duly sensible of the *inconsistency of their conduct*, who go about preaching from one county to another, when they have a particular flock committed to their charge. I wish you had, on the present occasion, seriously expostulated with them, and shewn yourself superior to that fear of man which bringeth a snare. With a spirit of meekness, as well as of zeal for the honour and peace of your Church, you might have thus addressed them :

“ Brethren, the eyes of the public, and of the Lord our God, are upon us. Consider—Were you ordained to be Apostles or Evangelists ? or have you qualifications to prove your being called to these high offices ? Ought you not to produce your commission from Heaven, to enlighten and convert the world at large, before you set about it, and before you assert you have received
such

such a commission? Why imitate the wandering Levites of old, and the circumambulation of Popish Friars, when you have a place and charge of your own? Why act as if you were Pastors to all the flocks in a city, or the kingdom? Why go about preaching from one parish, county, and diocese, to another, where the Gospel is already preached, and by Ministers far your superiors in learning, gifts, and doctrinal knowledge, if not in practical religion?—Reflect, whether your conduct doth not afford some just ground for the usual charge, “That your running about is to conceal a shallowness of parts, or an inattention to study; or from the conceit of a supposed insufficiency of the Ministers at and around the places you visit.” Be not *so censorious* as to represent your own brethren, or the Dissenting Ministers, as doing little or no good; nor *so vain* as to imagine you can and will do a great deal. Surely, you are not more or *better able* to convert souls than they. Take care, lest by your *intrusion* you incur the
 censure

censure of being “busy bodies,” and of not having that modesty and humility, preferring others in love, which the Holy Scriptures enjoin:—and be cautious that you give not the world occasion to say, that your chief care seems to be, to win over persons to a party and to yourselves (to make the most of them in temporal concerns) rather than unto Christ. Use no *mean* and *indirect arts* to get the pulpits of your brethren, or to alienate the affections of their people from them:—and far be it from you, to seek to evade the laws of your Church; or to secede from it half way, and then intrude yourselves upon Dissenters. Scorn to shelter yourselves, in *their meeting houses*, under the Act of Toleration, — with half one worship, and half another:— it hath been said, ’tis to collect people from all quarters, and to make property of them, as well as to introduce disorders into all religious assemblies. — Act consistently as members of the establishment, and support your *clerical character* in all things, agree-

able to your promises and subscriptions *ex animo* at your ordination, and your oath of canonical obedience. In fine, *be exemplary*, not in a zeal to take care of other Ministers charges, but with fidelity take care of the particular flock committed, or that may be committed, to your own; as those who must hereafter give a solemn account concerning them."

From the present appearance of things, 'tis high time, Sir, for the faithful Ministers of Jesus to set themselves to stem the *irregularities* prevalent among professors, too much countenanced and influenced by the *example* of some, and openly allowed by the *silence* of other Ministers, from whom better things might be expected. 'Tis of the last importance to your *awakened brethren*, to act steadily and uprightly according to the fixed principles and rules of your Church; since many have questioned the *reality* of a work of God being carried on in the souls of men, in various places (to the boasted number of thousands and tens of thousands), by the
instru-

instrumentality of persons who openly and wilfully violate their solemn promises, and are notoriously guilty of preaching and acting in defiance of their Ordinary or Bishop. You chuse "to confine yourself to the duties of your own charge*." May you have the divine presence with you!—and have many of your flock for your joy here, by their growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, and for a crown of rejoicing in the day of judgment!

I now proceed with you to another interesting particular.—You say †, "I am not under any disagreeable constraint from my superiors in the Church. The Archdeacon in his district, and the Bishop in his diocese, hold their respective visitations. On these occasions we answer to our names, hear a sermon or a charge, and usually dine together. There is nothing painful to me in paying these tokens of respect to my acknowledged superiors, and receiving marks of civility from them. At all times, while we keep within the li-

* p. 123.

† p. 125.

mits which I have subscribed and consented to *ex animo*, we scarcely know, at least we do not feel, that we have any *superiors*; and so far as I am concerned, I have reason to acknowledge that the administration of our Church government is gentle and liberal."

But, Sir, are the Ministers of Christ (those especially who believe they have received the Holy Ghost to preach his Gospel) to be dependant on the pleasure of Archdeacons and Bishops? And before you acknowledged them to be your superiors, you should have duly examined their right to be so: for only officers of Christ's appointment should be over his house; and their rule or government is only *pastoral*, by applying the Gospel to the consciences of men, not to *lord* it over their brethren, or over any part of God's heritage. You must know what our great favourite, the truly learned, judicious, and pious Mr. Howe wrote on this point: "Here, we (Dissenters) make our stand; and say that, till Dr. Stillingfleet (or any other man) hath *proved these things*, 1st,

That

That such a Church as he hath given us a notion of (*a national Church*) is actually a *divine institution*; and 2d, That God hath given to the ecclesiastical governors in it, *never chosen by the Christian community*, or to any other, power to *superadd institutions* of the nature above-mentioned (laws and decrees, new federal rites, signs, and symbols, with many more dubious and unnecessary things), and to enforce them with penalties,—all his reasonings that pretend to be *ad rem* are *to no purpose*, and do nothing at all advantage his cause*.” Yea this great man says, that “he who would go about to make such inferences (as the Conformists of that day did) from their ground of a national Church, and its ecclesiastical rulers, would gain to be *laughed at by all sober men*, instead of a *conclusion* †.”

Like him, I continue a firm Dissenter, and cannot but wonder how any, who prize and consult the Scriptures, under the notion of highly valuing the right of private judg-

* Howe's Works, vol. ii. p. 622.

† Ibid.

ment, and enjoying fully their liberty as Men and Christians, can leave us, and enlist under the ecclesiastical rulers of the Church of England. You indeed say, that their administration is *gentle* and *liberal*: but some of your own awakened brethren, even in this city, have complained of the administration as unreasonable, severe, and *tyrannical*; and on this account one of them thought it his duty to quit his parochial charge, and secede. I will leave him and you to settle the points, of his considering the care of souls in a *single parish* as “*too narrow a sphere for him,*” and of his and others having “*really received* a commission from the great Head of the Church to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”—May we not expect that the gifts of tongues and of miracles will soon be attempted also? But the following words of this apostle, and awakened brother, are entirely *ad rem*: “We could not *in conscience* submit to many of the canons of the Church of England, or that part of her discipline which we judge to be a
human

human imposition on the conscience, unreasonable, arbitrary, and unscriptural."*

How widely different is your opinion! — all is reasonable, gentle, and liberal with you. But shall we praise your superiors for this? understanding thereby *their neglecting to enforce* the strict observance of those rites and rules, which you and others subscribed *ex animo*. Either your awakened brethren were more disobedient than yourself, walked more disorderly, and paid less regard to their promises and subscriptions at receiving episcopal ordination; or your superiors are exceedingly *partial* in their administration. And this last appears to be the case; otherwise you could not have thus written: "I always acted in the parishes which I have served according to *my own judgment*; and I have done some things which have not the sanction of general custom†." It may be esteemed a felicity, that you "never met with the smallest check, interference, or mark of displeasure;

* Ordination Sermon at the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel.

† p. 127.

from any of your superiors in the Church, to this hour:" but was I in your situation, on reviewing my solemn subscription, my own conscience, which is superior to all the Bishops and rulers of the earth, would, on my *emitting or doing things* which have not the sanction of the Church, or of general custom in it, severely check, accuse, and condemn me. But with you all is quietness; and you exult,—“Such are my restraints, and such is my liberty.”—Your restraints we have seen by some of the canons; and your liberty is to deviate from them as you please; for you thus glory*: “I am bound by no regulations but what *I myself approve*; and within these boundaries I do as I please, no man forbidding or controlling me.”

Hence you have often thought that you had as good a right to the name of Independent as myself†. Surely not, as to our acknowledgment of, and our dependance upon, “our Lord and Saviour.” Indeed, with respect to “the *influence of men*,” your following boast is true,—“We have the ad-

* p. 127.

† p. 128.

vantage of you *.” That you are more *independent of your brethren*, is a palpable mistake ; but you are certainly “ *more independent of your people* †.”

As to *my* brethren, according to our plan (which is strictly *scriptural* also), “ every particular Church is (called Congregational, or, as you term it) Independent; possessing and exercising every kind of Church power within itself, and not subject to the control of any other Christian society ‡,” or any body or assembly of Ministers whatever :—and before you had asserted, or at the time you insinuated, that those of our Ministers, who, from their situation or connection, have more influence than others, and have opportunities of assisting poorer Ministers §, had thus exercised their influence, and proved themselves *unfriendly* to the liberty we so highly prize,—you should have produced some instances in proof. Till then, your thoughts will deservedly be considered as *apocryphal* as the chapters in the books of Tobit and Judith, as Bell and the Dra-

* p. 123. † Ibid. ‡ Ibid. § p. 129.

gon, &c. which you are obliged by *your superiors* to read at certain times in the Church, annually, to the exclusion of the Sacred Oracles.

With meekness I would pass by your comparing our Ministers “to a company of soldiers in their exercise, where every one *must move* in a prescribed line, keep the same pace, and make the like motions with the rest, on pain of being treated as refractory *.” I only entreat you, to assure your friends it is not true; and that you have taken up and propagated a reproach against your neighbour unjustly. There was no occasion then to add, by way of contrast, that “Ministers in the establishment know nothing of these restraints.” As you must have rather kept strange company among us, to receive such wrong intelligence,—so, if I were inclined to retort, I might say, that if you *adhere* to your subscriptions, you and all your brethren *must move* in a prescribed line, and make the like motions with the rest, on pain of being treated as refractory, and as some have found

* p. 130.

to their cost ;—and that many have not been excommunicated and deposed, is owing entirely to the gentleness, or remissness and indifference, of your bench of Bishops, and other your superior officers. You must acknowledge, that all the refractory and disobedient, but in one point or canon, are at mercy: but *as for my brethren*, we call no man lord or master among us ; and (with more propriety than you) can laugh at a board of Ministers even with impunity, should they step out of their line either to censure or to dictate.

Many must wonder at your next assertion : “ We Ministers in the establishment *are connected in love*, but *not upon system*: *we profess the same leading principles and aims*.” Verily, it hath not been long so ; but you remove the difficulty by saying, “ Each one acts singly and individually for himself *.”

We come now to what might justly be styled the *first* and *principal reason* of some men’s conformity, and chusing rather to be Ministers in the Church of England, than

* p. 131.

with

with the Dissenters. You think that you are “*more independent of your people ;*” and you truly are so. The constitution of our Churches appears to you faulty, “in giving a greater power to the people than the Scripture authorizes *.” And what is this great and unscriptural power?—You say, “Almost every individual conceives himself qualified to judge and to guide the Minister, to sift and scrutinize his expressions, and to tell him *how* and *what* he ought to preach †.” I know not all our Churches, or all the individuals you have been familiar with ; but this is not the case, Sir, in my Church, nor in any other with which I am acquainted. There is not one *real Dissenter* who assumes this power, or conceives himself thus qualified. Our flocks have more *self-knowledge* than thus to conceive or act ; and they better know their Pastors, before they chuse them, than to treat them thus. If there be any individuals now among us of *the cast* you have described, they came from you, or from one of your parties, to whom Church and Cha-

* P. 131.

† P. 133.

pel and Meeting-house, and *learned* or *illiterate Ministers*, are all alike. Such indeed have manifested itching ears after religious novelties,—are swift to run and hear every where, and will listen with rapture to the crudest performances, and rhapsodies of words, without order, sense, or meaning, and bless the rambling preacher as the wisest and greatest of all the men of God,—and yet go and hear in vain the excellent discourses of settled Pastors (who think it their duty to meditate on God's word, to study by day and by night, and seek to find out acceptable words for their hearers spiritual improvement and profit).—They will hear such men, as judges, with a magisterial spirit,—according to their ability will scrutinize the expressions,—and, being puffed up with spiritual pride, will say to one another as they depart from the house of God,—“ A poor gospel sermon truly!—how *little* about Christ and free grace,—and how *much* of walking worthy of God and of our holy vocation, and of keeping ourselves in the love of God,—of adding to our faith virtue, and a long list of other things,—and of our walking

walking in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord, blameless. The Minister is a self-righteousnift;—he understands not the *pure gospel*,—and we can do far better ourselves.”—Indeed, Sir, through “the fallies of some active spirits,” and “their incidental blemishes,” boys have learned from them to despise the best teachers, as if they knew nothing of Christ, or of his Gospel, and to set up themselves as inspired preachers.

You next suggest, that the *rich* among us, who can contribute most to the Ministers support, and the officers called *Deacons*, who are usually chosen from among the more wealthy,—“expect to be consulted, and that their judgment shall be followed :”—and you are pleased to assert, that “*our preaching must be suited to their taste and sentiment.*”—What manner of spirit is this, Sir?—a moderate and friendly one?—or can such an assertion be esteemed “a mean of promoting candour and benevolence among those, who, whatever else they differ in, have one Lord, one faith, one hope*.” Moralists consider it as an aggra-

* p. 160.

vation of the sin of slander, when committed under the cloak of religion, or with the mask of candour and benevolence.

What you say concerning *some of our poor Ministers*, may be literally applied to a *number of yours*. A faithful Minister, in his better hours, disdains the thought of complying with the caprice of his hearers, or conniving at their faults; yet, as you say*, human nature is weak,—and in such circumstances he stands in a state of temptation: and if he has grace to maintain his integrity, yet it is painful and difficult to be obliged frequently to displease those on whom we depend, and who, in some other respects, may be our best friends and benefactors. I can truly say, that my heart has been grieved for the opposition, neglect, and unkindness which some *valuable men among you*, to my knowledge, have met with from those, who ought to have esteemed them very highly for their work sake; and especially from some of their own dignified brethren.

“The effects of *supreme power*” lodged in

* p. 135.

ecclesiastics, “ and of the unsanctified spirit in which it has been exercised,” have been more severe and *fatal* than any effects of power lodged in the people.

It was *very prudent*, Sir,—when you mentioned our people having more power than the Scripture authorizes,—to confine it merely to their guiding, judging, and attempting an undue influence over their Ministers, by their wealth or office. And yet this, were it true, episcopal Ministers more or less experience also from their superiors, whether in wealth or office, and whether in their parishes or in palaces.—You have entirely omitted the *power* our people claim, and really exercise, in choosing their own Pastors and Teachers and Deacons. What think you of this power? Is it scriptural, or is it not? The care of souls is an important charge :—how came you and I by it? Was I chosen by my flock or parishioners, or the persons who contribute to my subsistence (to which right, as Men and Christians, they are entitled by nature, and which is supported by reason and revelation *)? or

* Acts vi. 5. xv. 22. 2 Cor. viii. 19—22.

was *I forced* upon them by the will, and at the pleasure of a *Patron*, to the deprivation of the people's right, and without their consent, or even knowledge?—and do I remain as their Minister, contrary to the wishes of many of them?—To have been the voluntary choice, and to have the affections of my people, is (next to the being useful among them) the greatest pleasure of my life: and for this one reason alone I could not conform to your Church—as its constitution deprives the people of that original and sacred right, and commits the care of all the souls of a parish over to the arbitrary option of one man, who for money hath purchased, or by inheritance obtained, the advowson; by which many unworthy persons are seated, and exalted over them with a lordly power beyond their control; and who will delegate the care of their souls to another stranger, for a few pounds a year. Your great oracle in ecclesiastical law informs you, that the Bishops were formerly elected by the Clergy, and *by the people*; for it was then thought convenient that the Laity should be considered in the election of Bishops,

shops, and *concur* in the election—that he who was to have the inspection of them all might come in by general consent *.

You say justly and experimentally, “We† in the establishment know but little of your difficulties; we are not so much at the *mercy* of our hearers for subsistence; and though we probably preach to some who are wiser and better, as well as richer than ourselves, we have no hearers of whom we should stand in fear, if they did *assume* a right to direct us.”—’Tis proper to have a spirit willing to profit by a hint even from a child, and to pay attention to the advice of any person who speaks to us in love, and in a right temper; and certainly humble loving Christians are more disposed to find fault with themselves than with their Minister, and to receive instruction than to offer it. And when men are effectually wrought upon by divine grace, their passions are restrained and brought into order; they are meek, mild, and live in peace. But should a conformist to the world, or a zealot for a party, expect you to accommodate your

* Burn, vol. j. 178.

† p. 136.

preaching

preaching to his practice, or to his Shibboleth, you say, " I could give him an answer, without being afraid of consequences :"—so can I, brother, and so will every faithful Minister of Jesus, let the consequences be what they may.—This reason of yours appears to be of *considerable weight* with you, and it hath had great influence with many others that have joined the national Church, " independency of the people for a subsistence : " but as to this, in a great degree, may be attributed the disregard which many of the Clergy shew to their parishioners, and their neglect of parochial duties, well knowing that their *stipends* and *viands* are ever sure—so, on the other hand, the *voluntary* contributions of our hearers may be of service to stimulate us in our work : but should our faithfulness displease, and they are withheld, I would rather choose poverty and affliction, with the testimony of a good conscience, than to enjoy all the large and certain emoluments which can possibly arise from a sinful compliance to unscriptural impositions, or conformity to a Church that countenances them,

and pours forth its *anathemas* against those who dissent from her Articles, Liturgy, and Canons. If I yet please men, or join any Church, for the sake of temporal things, am I yet a servant of Christ?

You next apprehend, that you have more liberty with respect to *your pulpits* than we have;—you have apprehended many things, beside this, that were wrong, and have no existence. We can invite whom we please, let his country or denomination be what it will, to preach in our pulpits, and reject whom we please, as far as my acquaintance extends; nor can I suppose that any principal person in our Churches would force a Minister into the pulpit, contrary to the will of the Pastor. But this is *not your liberty*; you can invite no Christian dissenting brother, under penalty of imprisonment; nor the most learned and pious of the foreign reformed Divines, without their previous appearance before the Bishop, and assenting to the thirty-nine Articles. I wish to pass by your following insinuations with *silence*—shall only say, I have heard sermons from some of your pul-

pits, the strain of which has been so very different from the professed sentiments of the proper Minister of the Church, that I have thought to myself, as well as you, "how came this Minister to preach in this place?" Upon enquiry, I found, at one time, that the Gentleman was employed as a Curate by the Vicar; who, though esteemed an *eminent Gospel preacher*, liked to live in another part of the kingdom, and who hired the Curate, knowing his sentiments to be widely different from his own, because he would serve him cheaper than any other; and that his mode of preaching, and sentiments, would be also more agreeable to the people than his own.—At another time I found a Dignitary of the Church, and even a Bishop, was asked to preach, at the desire of a principal person in one of your Congregations, who it seems approved him, though I was persuaded the Pastor did not. So easy may your reasoning and reflections as to us be returned back upon you.

Sir, it is a branch of my Christian liberty, as well as yours, "that I can hear whom I please, and form what acquaintance I please,

among the various denominations of Christians, without being called to account for it* ;” and I hope both Episcopalians and Dissenters are advancing more into this liberty. You intimate, that you know some among our people who would willingly hear you occasionally, were they not *afraid of their Ministers* ;—what then is become of that *dictatorial power* which you just now said was lodged in our people ?—it is soon vanished, if it had any real being. It now turns out, that some are truly afraid of their Ministers, though possessing only the simple name and office of a Pastor, and armed with no canons nor anathemas. However, it seems also, that “ you know some of our Ministers who would be willing to hear you, but do not, because *they are afraid of their people* †.” This charge I believe, Sir, cannot be applied to any of our learned, regular, and approved Ministers ;—I should have been glad to have seen their names mentioned, that I might have *pitied* them, and *censured* their people. They must be some *lay brethren*, con-

* p. 139.

† p. 140.

verts from another quarter, who are not yet properly fixed in good places, or look forward to episcopal ordination and a valuable rectory, to free them from this plebeian tyranny.

Thus much (though more might be said) by way of comparing *our advantages* in point of liberty. I am *well pleased* with my lot; if you are equally pleased with yours I am glad of it, but wish you were more sensible of your ecclesiastical bondage. I write only on the defensive, I do not expect to alter your views. Enjoy your boasted liberty; only allow me in peace to enjoy, and be thankful for mine.

I have now examined your *two principal reasons* for not being a Dissenter. The *first*, you say, concerned your conscience: "though your regard to the authority of the great Lord and Lawgiver of the Church did not *directly* oblige you to unite with the establishment,—it discouraged you, however, from uniting with any of the parties, who pretended an exclusive right from Christ to enforce their

own particular Church forms * :” and, to put an end to all your difficulties, you united with the *strongest* and *richest*, and *mightiest* party, who pretended to no such exclusive right from Christ; and you was content with the *assumed power* of the King or Queen of the land for the time-being, to enforce any particular forms and rites in the Church, with unscriptural and temporal penalties.

When conscience did not interfere, your *second* reason was confessedly “rather of a *prudential kind*, but of considerable weight.” You will pardon my smiling at your declaration, that “you loved liberty, and *therefore* gave a preference to the Church of England, believing you might in that situation exercise your Ministry with the *most freedom*.” —You have made the experiment, and I believe you have no reason to repent of it on a secular account.

These points being cleared, my way is open to attend to another consideration, which had a farther influence in determin-

ing your mind. *A third reason* for your being a Conformist, was, *the probability of greater usefulness*.—When all other reasons fail, *this* is always sure to be offered; and he must or should be a prophet that attempts to gainsay it; unless by saying, “do no evil that good may come.”—If a sacred regard to the honour and authority of Christ, as sole Head, and Lawgiver of his Church, forbid you, no probability of greater usefulness should sway for an exchange.—You say *, “This probability, as to those who can conform with a good conscience, seemed to lie on the side of the establishment on several accounts. Great multitudes in this Christian nation are grossly ignorant of the first principles of Religion, inattentive to the worth and welfare of their souls, and lamentably destitute of the *proper means* of instruction.”—This last paragraph rather conveys a strong reflection on the supreme Governor of your Church, for *inattention* to so important a point; or on your Bishops, and superior of-

* p. 142.

ficers under him ; or on your brethren, who
 are so well paid for taking care to instruct
 and promote the welfare of souls : and may
 I not add, doth it not militate against your
 former high encomiums on a national esta-
 blishment, and your curious argument for
 the necessity of one ? doth it not also de-
 grade a little your Rubric and Liturgy ?—If
 the general strain of it be so “scriptural,
 evangelical, and experimental, and it re-
 cognises all the distinguishing doctrines of
 the Gospel,” how comes it to pass there
 are such great multitudes, in this Christian
 nation, so grossly ignorant ? It proves, bro-
 ther, that the kingdom may be divided even
 into small parishes, and the Church ser-
 vice be performed on the Sabbath-day, and
 every feast-day, vigil, fast, and solemn day
 (making up together *two hundred and one days*
 out of the three hundred and sixty-five) and
 still the people be grossly ignorant. How
 many even of your Clergy, after all their read-
 ing of your Creeds, and of the Book of Com-
 mon Prayer, are said *not* to know the Gospel as
 they ought to know ? You had certainly op-
 portunities,

portunities, in the establishment, of preaching to many who could not hear the Dissenters; and, as faith more usually comes by hearing, it may be God's condescension and goodness to permit his Ministers to think differently on some external points, that they may with an upright heart serve him in the different departments of his vineyard. They who are Dissenters upon *principle* would however act against their judgments and consciences, were they to conform for the sake of usefulness, of a name, of popularity, or of gain.—I am well content to remain as I am.

You next complain, "That the spirit of bigotry and prejudice is too prevalent on all sides *."—But I know no Dissenters, Sir, "who would think it sinful to be seen within the walls of a Church;" though I know some more ready to be seen there, and encourage your brethren, than they are to support the Pastors of their own choice. Boasted inspirations, wandering stories, religious wonders, fine singing, and a harlequin vehemence of *tone* and *gesture*, will

* p. 144.

have

have their votaries for a season, but a day of *settlement* in religion will come at last.

You acknowledge there are other persons, who place a principal part of their religion in an ignorant attachment to *your forms*, and could not easily be prevailed upon to enter within the doors of a Meeting-house; but this prepossession in favour of your Churches you esteem a *great felicity*, for “* it gives the Minister who can conscientiously meet them there a great advantage *ad hominem*, by confirming the truths of the Gospel from the tenor of the Liturgy and Articles, to which they profess some regard.” And yet, notwithstanding your fine *national establishment*, and your *Gospel Liturgy*, you are forced to confess there are still “places where the Gospel is considered as a novelty †.”

I hope God has been pleased in many instances to honour your service with his blessing; and when the truth is made manifest to the hearts of enquirers, and they are turned from darkness to light, and from the

* p. 145.

† Ibid.

bondage of sin to serve the living God; their former prejudices will subside; and no wonder “that many, who once despised and hated the Dissenters, have been afterwards persuaded to join with them.” It is reasonable to suppose that the awakened Christian would choose that worship and discipline which is most pure and scriptural: you should not be *angry* with such, or with us, however, for this desirable conversion.

Your next observation is *new*, and very striking:—While you are careful to deny that your brethren received *so much* as their views of the Gospel from us, you say, “that the Dissenting interest would probably have been much weaker than it is at present, if it had not been strengthened by the accession of many Church-members, and more than a few of your Teachers and Pastors, who were first awakened under ours*.” How differently will men reason!—By this very thing, if just and true, the *Dissenting interest* hath been generally supposed, by the judicious, to be *exceedingly injured* and weakened, instead of strengthened. You your-

* p. 146.

self boast against us, that the *most judicious* and *spiritual* of your people are *proof* against the insinuations which prevail on some to forsake the Church of England, in hopes of obtaining a purer and more acceptable worship among the Dissenters* ;—so that, you being the judge, the accession of *many Church-members*, and more than a few *Teachers and Pastors* to us from your quarter, is made up only from the *most injudicious*, and the *least spiritual*, or almost carnal ones : and indeed, brother, they are a very different kind of Dissenters, from the *Puritans* or their descendants. Some of our Ministers have had much reason to complain of their accession, finding them light minded, giddy, wavering, unstable, vain also, censorious, ostentatious, and some of them still placing a principal part of their religion in an ignorant attachment to forms. To these converts from you, may be chiefly ascribed “the divisions and subdivisions which have crumbled large societies into separate handfuls,” of which you speak. They are busybodies, restless, and will meddle with other

* P. 147.

persons religious concerns and connections unasked, and neglect family religion, and other duties of godliness. Their favourite maxim is, "Neither circumcision is any thing, nor uncircumcision — that is, neither the Church of England, nor any other established Church, nor any of the Dissenting Churches, is *any thing*, but a new creature — and, being born again, we will go to this, and that, and any place where the Gospel is preached; and no walls or rules, no discipline or Church order, or love of a regular Minister or Pastor, shall keep us. — If the Pastor be grieved or offended, let him be so; — and if he be not quiet, we will out with him and his *orderly ones* too."

As for the *few Teachers* come over to us, that were *awakened* by you or your Ministers, I know not to whom you allude: this we know, that some would not have been with us, could they, like you, have *sailed into the Church of England* with *wind and tide* in their favour; and they were rather against us than for us, when preaching in Chapels, till a good door opened for them

to

to enter into the fruits of other men's labour; however, let us hope there are a select few who will rather strengthen than weaken our hands. The aim of my Ministry, I trust, is not to promote the interests of a party, but to win souls for Christ. And we have the comfort to find, equally with yourself, that a number are not only *called*, but *edified* and *established* by the blessing of God on our preaching. The most judicious and spiritual of our people are proof also against the numberless insinuations and artifices which are practised, and which prevail on a few to neglect the order of our Churches, and run to and fro with a childish levity, as fancy or as humour leads, after every wandering star, and after every new Gospel-preacher that appears in your pulpits. As to those who do thus leave us, and walk disorderly, if they are truly benefited, if they really grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord, in humility, meekness, benevolence, and deadness to the world, more among you than amongst us, I can sincerely rejoice. And, instead of being either displeased

pleased or sorry, for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in praises, that God has raised up Ministers to preach to thousands, to whom I and my brethren would never have had access.

We now proceed to a *tender point*; and though you wished to touch upon it with great tenderness, you have handled us *very roughly*, if not in a very *unchristian manner*. We have none of us any thing to boast of, indeed:—our warmest exertions in the service of such a master as Christ, are far too cold; and our greatest success falls very short of what we ought to pray for. But though we preach no other Gospel than you do, yet, it seems, we do not preach it with *that animation*, or with the *presence* and *power* of the spirit of the Lord, as do the Ministers in the Church of England. Hence you conclude *, “that the general state of our Churches, at present, is not so lively and flourishing as it was in the days of the old Non-conformists.” Doubt-

* p. 149.

less, our people were long ago sensible of a decline in some places; they sincerely lamented it, and earnestly prayed for a revival. Their prayers have been in some measure answered, but not altogether in the way you presume. Your charity will not allow so much as one Dissenter to be an *instrument* in spreading the revival of religion:—"the instruments were *not Dissenters* *." Who were they then? "*Regular parochial Ministers*, that preached the doctrines of the reformation."—And you tell us, "the number is still increasing;"—so that our people need not in the least be troubled about a *succession of Gospel Ministers* for themselves; they may hear the proper doctrines in the parochial Churches, and withal to much greater advantage.—For you judge, "that the Lord's presence with his word, in awakening sinners, and in applying it with power to the heart, was more evident and striking on your side than on ours." It certainly must be more striking; because, ac-

* p. 150.

ording to your own confession, the work with you is rather *new*; whereas amongst us it is of an *older date*. However, Sir, permit me to say, more than the *name*, first imposed as a stigma on Dissenters from the establishment, by the world,—and more than a *form*, which owed its value to the Spirit that enlivened it, and to its agreement with, and being founded on, the word of God,—*still remains* with us; and many of the instruments of the revival of pure religion in the heart, and in the nation, were and are *bonâ fide* Dissenters.

What *name* will you give to your next insinuation, and even open charge,—That some among us, who were competent judges of a revival, have been prevented by their prepossessions from rejoicing in what God has wrought amongst you?—and add *, “I fear that a *spirit* of prejudice and party discovered itself upon the occasion, which proved hurtful to some good men. When I think of the abilities and characters of some Dissenting Ministers, I cannot but ascribe the *little visible success* they meet with, in some

* p. 152.

measure, to their *unwillingness to acknowledge a work of God* in which they themselves were not employed." Surely our Ministers cannot but cordially thank you for this high expression of brotherly love. We, to be sure, are influenced by a spirit of prejudice, party, and envy : yea, we are *worse than the reprobate* in the days of the Psalmist. Ps. cxxvi. 2. The heathens, who had been used to harass and insult the Jews, and scoff at their religion and their God, *willingly acknowledged* "the Lord hath done great things for them : " but we, it should seem, were utterly unwilling to acknowledge a work of God, in which we ourselves were not employed ; and so have been righteously punished by the Almighty, in the little visible success we meet with. If this be true, here is a loud call to our people to break up their solemn assemblies,—forsake their envious and heathenish Ministers, who are themselves forsaken of God,—and, as one man, unite themselves with you.

I would turn my eyes from this paragraph—written, like all the others, you say,

“ in

“in a moderate and friendly spirit*,” to another more just and pleasing.—You are forced to acknowledge that “our exceptions against the methods and ways pursued by the instruments of the work of God among you, were not *wholly groundless* †.” The whole world witnesseth, there was great reason to suspect the *truth* of many of their boasted conversions. They were too hasty and *positive* in deciding on the spiritual state of their votaries,—did not duly consider that the bulk of them were ignorant what a *work of God* is,—nor did they themselves properly distinguish between those things which are evidences of such a work, and those which are not;—and seemed to be ignorant how precarious that religion and profession must be, which hath its rise in the *passions*.—But a very decent apology can still be made for *them* by you: “A *lively zeal* for the glory of God and the good of souls, in persons whose judgments were not fully ripened by observation and experience, did not secure them from *incidental mistakes* and *blemishes*. ‡”

* p. 160.

† p. 153.

‡ Ibid.

And these, it seems, “*were easily seen, and eagerly noticed*” by our prejudiced and envious Ministers ; and “*a desire of being free from the least suspicion of giving countenance to the unguarded, though well-meant sallies of active spirits,*” you suppose to have led them into a *contrary extreme* : and thus their public discourses, though solid and judicious compositions, lost animation in delivery ; and the number of the hearers has been much smaller than the number of pews in the place.”— Something, Sir, beside *animation* in delivery, is necessary to keep up an auditory ; much more to convert the soul, and effect the revival of religion. My brethren cannot use any undue means for promoting even the cause of God ; much less have recourse to the *low means* to obtain crowded pews and assemblies, which many do : nor can they sacrifice their *understanding* and *integrity* for popularity. If they saw the mistakes and blemishes, and unguarded sallies of your clerical brethren and friends, they noticed them with concern of mind, and were sorry for the occasion. They thought that some of their
sallies,

sallies, though well meant, were giving the enemy of pure religion an advantage, and must prove pernicious to the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom. The best end is vitiated, when pursued by *wrong*, not to say *unlawful*, means. — We thought there should have been more regard paid to the nature and ends of the canonical subscription, and the sacred promises at ordination ; — that there should have been more respect paid to the regular parochial Clergy, and fewer hard names bestowed upon them ; — that there should have been less boasting of extraordinary measures of light, inspiration, and assistance from the spirit of God ; — and more care taken to guard what they delivered to the people in the name of the Lord, and for his truths, — and also *against* disorders in practice, as well as errors in doctrine. — We knew it to be much easier to make Methodists than real Christians ; and far easier to persuade persons to trust in the merits of Christ, than to copy his example, and observe his commandments. We wished your brethren ; while they preached the doctrines of

grace and a precious Christ, to instruct their hearers in the whole compass of their duty, as believers in him,—and have grounded and confirmed them in every Christian grace and virtue :—though *this indeed* was not the way to be popular, and followed from pulpit to pulpit, and from one end of the city to another,—nor to have separate chapels built for them.—We lamented over the inconsistencies and unguarded expressions which often dropped from their lips in preaching ; and wished they had been more careful in ascertaining the work of God in the soul, and distinguishing its marks and effects to their numerous hearers ; and that they had been more suspicious as to the truth of many conversions among you, which they still cry up to be thousands and tens of thousands. How many have manifested, by their after lives, that their religion and joy was only a sudden flash,—a spark of their own kindling ;—rather a commotion of the passions, than a change of the will, or of the temper and the mind. And, Sir, though it be now fashionable and popular for some “ active spirits”

rits" to cry down *doctrinal knowledge*, and depreciate that religion which hath any connection with the understanding,—your converts will ever be *unstable* in their principles, and moveable in their affections and conduct, unless first steadfast in their judgment.

An *active spirit* may think it better to alarm the passions, and frighten the imaginations of his hearers, than to exhibit the truths of God to enlighten the understanding, and inform their judgments. But hence it is, that many boast of Christ in their heart, without the least knowledge in the head; others begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh,—and become spots in your feasts of charity or love, feeding without fear;—and soon prove clouds without water, carried about of winds.

You are pleased to say *, "One consideration which deterred me from joining the Dissenters was, a fear lest the *love of peace*, and a *temper rather compliant*, might insensibly betray me into an *over-cautious spirit*,

* p. 154.

damp my zeal, or divert it into a wrong channel,—and thereby prevent the success at which I aimed. I rather chose to unite with those people, whom I thought the *most likely* to maintain and encourage what little fervour I possessed; and where I saw the *most evident tokens* of a power from on high accompanying the public ministrations.”—Really, brother, had you continued with us, you might have enjoyed as much peace, and manifested as ardent a zeal, as you do now, and possessed as much fervour to the full; and I believe, have enjoyed an equal proportion of success, and seen as evident tokens of a power from on high accompanying the public ministrations.—I think your *zeal* for conformity hath diverted these pointed *reflections* into a very wrong channel.—Are we to consider this curious paragraph as directed against our Ministers, or as furnishing *excellent baits* to draw away our people from attending Ministers who have so few tokens of God’s presence with them? and thus they will become as lively and fervent

vent Christians as yourself. The reason of your choice for uniting with the established Church, here given, is also *singular*. For, after you got episcopal ordination, as “you did not like to be an itinerant, but to have a regular stated charge in the Church,” it must be exceedingly *uncertain* whether you could get such a parish by the gift of a patron, or be settled and united with a people who would *like* your zeal, and *encourage* the *little fervour* you possessed. I heartily wish, however, you may now, and always, be united with those who love the Gospel, and approve the things that are most excellent.

But, Sir, if the people were to form their opinion, where we are to see and enjoy the *most evident tokens* of power from on high accompanying public ministrations, by what *one* of your *awakened brethren* hath printed, every Methodist chapel and tabernacle, and sometimes your own Churches, where the most lively zeal abounds, must be deserted as *destitute* of them. Hear him, “Where is the presence of God most to be found? *Among* the fingers of poems (hymns), or the fingers of psalms?

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What says matter of fact? It speaks to the point, and determines in favour of God's word. The Holy Spirit does not put honour upon men's poems, when set up in the Church in opposition to his divine hymns. Yea, he disgraces them,—he leaves the fingers to themselves,—and then their performance is without life and power. It keeps up no communion with God. It is not the means of grace, but degenerates into a *mere entertainment*; and is the same thing in the Church, that music is in the *play-house*.—But says one—‘I am a witness to the contrary; I have found profit by singing hymns, and *I am sure* I have received pleasure.’—You may fancy so, but perhaps it is *only fancy*. You cannot have the end without the means. You might be pleased, but *profited* you could not. The profit is God's blessing upon the use of his own means, but you did not use the means; nay, you despised his, and followed your own self-love.—You may bring your poems into the Church, and may be vastly delighted with performing them;—so is the vainest creature

creature alive at the *opera*. The pleasure, in both cases, arises from the same cause;—some animal joy is excited,—a fine tune well played, well sung,—a very agreeable entertainment;—but there could be no more spiritual edification in one than in the other, because *neither* of them was the ordinance of God.—The primitive Church had great simplicity in their psalm-singing, which we are told was corrupted by the *heretics*. Complaint is made particularly of *Arius*, that he perverted singing into an entertainment:—he composed several *light, frothy tunes*, by which he sought to please trifling people. Herein he succeeded;—his music was admired, and did a great deal of hurt.—*Let us take warning from hence*.*”

I come now to your *fourth* and *last reason*, and which must depend chiefly upon your own testimony and apprehensions:—“The proofs I had, that the *Lord, by the openings and leadings of his providence*, pointed out to me the situation in which I was to serve him.”—Great obscurity covers all you have

* Romaine's Preface to a Collection of Psalms.

been

been pleased to advance on this head. The first explicit notice you gave of your desire to enter the Ministry, was to an intimate friend in our denomination, nearly six years before you was ordained. In the course of this interval, you say, "you made and received a variety of applications and proposals, but *every thing* failed; and *every door* by which you sought admission remained shut against you." And yet you were admitted to preach among us; and many doors of our places of worship were open to you.—What can be your meaning?—You had thus, it appears, leisure to examine the subject of Church government more closely; and the result of your disquisitions was at length the complete removal of the difficulties and exceptions you had at first *hastily* imbibed against the establishment *. If there really were no other motives to, and reasons for, your conformity, than what your present correspondence adduces, your most prejudiced friends must say, that you seem to have examined the subject of Church government *very superfi-*

* P. 157.

cially,

tially,—your difficulties were very easily removed,—or your temper was exceedingly compliant indeed. You add—“ At length the Lord’s time came; then obstacles apparently insurmountable suddenly and unexpectedly disappeared. Then I learnt the reason of former disappointments. My way had been mercifully hedged up with thorns, to prevent me from taking a *wrong course*, and to keep me waiting until the place and service of his own appointment were prepared and ready for me *.”—Still we are left to conjecture about your *insurmountable obstacles*, and former disappointments,—and what this *merciful hedge of thorns* was, that prevented you from taking a wrong course. I have always understood that your public services were not popular, nor very acceptable to the Dissenters. You did not make any pretensions to extraordinary gifts, like some of your brethren, and others were preferred before you. — But why should these common difficulties to a young Minister, —why should such obstacles in entering among us, which all more or less experi-

* p. 158.

ence,

ence, be considered as a merciful hedge of thorns, any more than the late Archbishop of York's *refusing* you ordination, at your earnest solicitation, when you *first essayed* to enter into the established Church? And many were the steps you took to succeed elsewhere; which things are here *all suppressed*, and carefully kept out of our view.—Might not these repulses be justly considered as “the openings and leadings of God’s providence, pointing out to you the situation in which you was *not* to serve him?” Many persons would have thought the Archbishop’s refusal to *ordain* you, was *of the Lord*,—to prevent your taking a *wrong course*, and to keep you in the place of his own appointment; though it were not so honourable in the eyes of the world, nor the duty so easy, or so profitable as to temporals.

This is all you have to offer on your *last reason* for preferring the Church of England to any other, except “the *most assured persuasion* in my own mind, that I was following the call, and doing the will of God; of which I had at that time little more doubt than

than if an angel had been sent from Heaven to tell me so*.”—Many eminent persons have had the same *assured persuasion*, but afterwards found themselves awfully mistaken. You remember the testimony and experience of the great Apostle Paul:—“ I *verily* thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth,” even to the breathing out threatenings and slaughter against his saints.

I am sincerely

Yours, &c.

* p. 159.

M

LETTER

LETTER IV.

My dear friend and brother,

THE contents of your four letters have been minutely considered—"the *ideal* correspondence which you began about seven years ago, and wrote more than one half of it in a few weeks*." My correspondence is *real*, not *ideal*; and I began it on Monday, May the 24th, not having read your epistles until the 20th of that month. More than two letters were written in one week; which bespeaks some candour in your perusing the answer. I felt a great reluctance to proceed; but observing the evil tendency and operation of your *Apologia*, I thought it my duty to complete my design;—and happy shall I be, if the event proves that I have been led to

* P. 159.

choose the fittest time, and to offer a word in season,—leaving a more critical examination of your work to an abler pen.

It is but little, and seldom, that Protestant Dissenters speak in their own cause, though often urged thereto;—but whether we speak or keep silence, contrary to our wish, we have opponents delighting in controversy; and we are sure, from year to year, to be censured, and even traduced. By a *silence* after your *recent assault* upon us, the considerate part of mankind might think our cause not so good as it really is, or its friends unable to vindicate it, or our Ministers to be *dumb dogs* indeed; especially, as to some of them you publicly made presents of your letters against them; and as in the reasons assigned for your conformity to the establishment, you have assumed the *very ground* on which a dissent from all ecclesiastical establishments chiefly and ultimately must rest.

Permit me to say, I have a deep sense on my mind of the inestimable worth of the *Dissenting interest*, and of the importance of maintaining it; and to serve it, would give me the greatest pleasure. Among the Dissenters,

the RIGHTS of private judgment, and of conscience, have their *palladium*. Our dissent is a public and *solemn protest* against all human power and authority in the concerns of religion and the soul. The very origin of national Church establishments confessedly lies in power and numbers, not in truth and the Sacred Oracles. Their terms of communion must be pronounced to be purely *political*: and the multitude will always submit their understandings and conscience to what is called the *public wisdom* and *conscience*, and be of that faith and worship which the great and mighty *patronize*. As soon as Christianity was interwoven into the civil constitution, the number of its professors increased apace, and the whole Roman empire became Christian suddenly;—the emperor's faith was the faith of his subjects in general, and of the clergy;—and soon the *civil power*, by its establishments of religion, and peculiar favours to the Ministers thereof that were the most obsequious and servile, raised an *ecclesiastical authority* both formidable and daring, and which continues more or less to the present time.

Though you bless God for the religious establishment in this state, and dread the consequences of its provisions being removed and annihilated,—yet, Sir, instead of *nine tenths* of the kingdom being deprived, at a stroke, of the very form of public religion, and reduced in a short time to a state little better than heathenism *,—if the kingdom were delivered from paying the present large stipends, and exorbitant tithes, to support men in dignity and luxury, who hire curates, and keep them poor, to discharge the duty, if possible, for them,—*more* than nine-tenths would be able to choose and properly support *scriptural pastors*, faithfully to watch over and feed their souls. According to the primitive mode of particular or congregational Churches, there would be nothing to feed ambition, nor any method of promoting worldly power and grandeur under the name of *Church* and *religion*: and if magistrates would distribute their bounties, not to say the immense revenues, now enjoyed by the dignified clergy of the establishment, with their

* p. 18.

numerous retinue and attendants, according to the real merit and usefulness of the Ministers of religion, of whatever denomination,—scarcely *one parish* or place in the kingdom would be long without the knowledge and influence of the ever blessed Gospel; and the Church of Christ would appear with a more pleasing face, and pure religion display a brighter lustre, than it hath ever yet done in this island *.

All great errors and evils in the Christian Church had small beginnings: we are therefore not to make light of those things in religion, which yet may *not* be of the essence thereof; how much less when they affect the very constitution of the Church of Christ, in its faith, discipline, officers, and worship. You may call the forms and rites of the Church of England very harmless and indifferent; but for any men to *devise* and *impose* them on others, is to invade the peculiar right of the Lord Jesus, who is head over all things to his own Church. If they be indifferent, and our Lord hath left them so,

* See more on this point before, p. 20.

why should not the rulers of the earth, and especially his own ambassadors and servants, leave them so likewise, and not *bind* them as terms necessary to Christian communion, to be enforced with excommunications and the power of the secular arm?

As followers of the Son of God, and reverencing his authority, our *forefathers*, to avoid sin in submitting to modes of worship for which there was no warrant in Scripture, shunned the communion of your Church, and became *Dissenters*; thousands of them to the loss of all things, even of liberty, and life itself! They were convinced that, in this case, no respect was to be paid to names or authorities, though the greatest upon earth. No one is to dispense with the commands of God; and no one, by his wisdom, can compose *canons* to be compared with the *rules* of the great Author and finisher of our faith. His collection they esteemed to be large enough; it wanted no addition, and is not capable of improvement by weak and fallible men. They well knew also, that the conscience, by being inured to bow down, would soon wax slavish and stupid; and every

sorry reason would content it, for pleasing men, and courting ease and safety, not to say temporal emoluments : so that, like the great Apostle Paul, even in *things lawful*, they would not be brought under the power of any man. They thought it their duty to adhere to Christ, and his perfect rule of faith and practice, though the multitude preferred the broad way of an implicit faith in their rulers, and would worship as the King and Parliament pleased and required they should : and hence they were vilified,—squeezed both in spiritual and civil courts,—haled before merciless rulers,—languished and died in prisons, praying for their persecutors, and committing their stripped, persecuted families to the Father of the fatherless, and the widow's Judge.

This mischief of national religious establishments is obvious to the meanest capacity. For if their authors have a right to fix them, and to judge and punish those who dissent from them, in one country, *equally* so in another : and thus the blood of the Protestants in Popish countries,—the blood of all the
 martyrs

martyrs in the primitive ages, under the heathen rulers,—and the blood of Christ himself, by the Jewish high-priest and rulers, was innocently spilt. The mischief of impositions, and of mingling human inventions in religion, is also obvious. An excellent writer long ago observed, “ They eat as a canker, breed formality and distractions, *pervert men’s zeal*, give way to anti-christian spirits and designs, and commonly have been the occasions of deadly persecutions, from the days of the Pharisees even till now *.”

You are partly sensible of this, Sir, and of the *irregularities* and *disorders* which the perverted zeal of high-churchmen, in former days, and of some “awakened brethren” hath occasioned in modern times. To their standing up for the established articles and modes of worship, they added contumely and penalties; and evil entreated those who dissented from them. Our Ministers have been branded, from age to age, with almost

* Familiar Enquiry concerning the fixed Rule of God’s Worship.

every

every injurious epithet; and in late years their people have been exhorted to forsake them, under the notion of their being mere legal preachers, unconverted persons, and utterly unfit for Gospel Churches,—as having a spirit lusting to envy and party, and opposers of the work of God carrying on in the Church of England. I will grant also, that most of the clergy of your own denomination have come in for their share of abuse also: for there have been men among you, who, looking upon themselves as the *only friends and favourites* of the Lord Jesus in the land, turned themselves against their own brethren of the establishment, and stuck not to represent them as heathen moralists, Baal's priests, and perjured persons, preaching contrary to their solemn subscriptions at ordination. By a humble carriage at first, and talking as if they were full of Christ and his spirit, they insinuated themselves into the affections of numbers, and crept into their bosoms before they were aware. Hence the bounds of your *parochial communion* were laid waste in many places; and

and hence separations from several dissenting congregations ; and hence many evil words and works.

You are fully convinced that, besides these gentlemen's " incidental mistakes and blemishes," their *manner* of preaching cannot be proved to have a greater influence on the hearts and lives of professors, than the labours of others, to make them wiser persons or better Christians. Rather, out of a seeming great veneration for the name and person of Christ, some have almost exposed his Gospel to contempt,—poisoned the minds of their followers,—and made too many of them inattentive to purity of heart and holiness of life ; and yet they are confident of salvation.

And shall we be silent, brother, amidst the reproaches cast on ourselves, and the evils we see taking place in the religious world ? What hath been gained by silence, and winking at the blemishes of such preachers and such professors ? Disorders have increased instead of abated.—The Apostle Paul did not stand by a silent spectator of the envying, strife,

strife, and divisions that were among the Christians at Corinth, nor of the trimming behaviour of his brother Peter at Antioch. You may indeed think that religion will suffer by our withstanding, and bringing them forth to public view: but surely the religion of Jesus cannot suffer, by our pointing out the things which are really evil, though among persons whom we esteem; and endeavouring, in reasonable ways, to check and suppress them. You have accordingly entered the lists, and set the *noble example* to me and my brethren; and have endeavoured to animate us, by exposing to public view *our supposed* bad principles, spirit, and usages.

It is now high time for us to join in guarding our people against errors in doctrine, and disorders in practice. If any are industrious in scattering the poison,—as *faithful Pastors*, we will be equally industrious in spreading the antidote, to prevent the progress of the contagion, to cure the infected, to prevent the ignorant and unwary from seduction, to settle the wavering and unstable,

stable, and to establish the Christian in the way of truth, holiness, and eternal life : yea, to recover those that are lost, should be attempted by every Pastor who would be able to say with the Apostle, “ I am pure from the blood of all men.”—As your letters were designed to prevent any individual from forsaking the Church of England, through the hope of enjoying a purer worship among the Dissenters.—Permit me, therefore, in my turn, to exhort the judicious and spiritual, of every denomination, to search the Scriptures for themselves, and to honour the Lord Christ in all things ; to join themselves to no Churches but such as are formed by the rule of his word, by *canons* which the Holy Ghost hath delivered, and not by the canons of men ; and to own no other *officers* in and over his house, but such as are of his own appointment, and whose *rule* is only spiritual, applying the Gospel to the consciences of men. This course the Apostles, and primitive Ministers of the Gospel, took to plant Christianity in the different nations ; and they succeeded, though opposed, instead of favoured,
by

by all the religious and civil establishments in the world. And if the different religious establishments through the universe were abolished, and the *many millions* appropriated to their support turned into another channel, and a full toleration given, to preach the religion of Jesus in all places,—there is abundant reason, as before hinted, to conclude and hope, our pure and undefiled religion would not only still subsist, but prevail more than ever, through this kingdom, and make its way rapidly through all the earth again.

I am now drawing towards the close, and think you will not be sorry for it. I should be ashamed to have written so much on my own account; but, since the appearance of your *Apologia*, so inimical to the *Dissenters*, and peculiarly injurious to their cause, which is the cause of *liberty civil and ecclesiastical*; and to their *Ministers*, who whatever else they differ in from you, have one Lord, one faith, and one hope,—I thought something on the subject was necessary; if it were only to preserve the *little candour* and for-

bearance which some of your brethren exercise towards us. Many persons have wondered how you could represent your letters as written in a *moderate* and *friendly spirit*, and yourself as *praying* and *endeavouring* to preserve it; and how you could possibly think that your publication might be “a *mean*, accompanied by the Lord’s blessing, of promoting *candour* and *benevolence*” among the serious and evangelical of all denominations. What must you think, and what the humble Christian, full of that brotherly kindness and gentleness and meekness which the Gospel enjoins, and which are among the chief of the fruits of the spirit—what must such think, when they compare and read the few following extracts from your *Apolo-
logia*, selected out of many?

First, as to Protestant Dissenters *in general*.—In page 11, you are at a loss what sense to put on the term, or what to think of that, which is styled the *Dissenting Interest*;—’tis at least a *heterogeneous body*:—and then bring forward, as for public reproach,
that

that there are many among us who depreciate the person and blood of the Saviour, and deny the agency and influence of the Holy Spirit, and the total depravity of fallen man: and therefore you cannot, in a religious view, be a *friend* to the Dissenting Interest.—A suitable answer hath been already returned to this *; but permit me to add, these *reflections* come with a very bad grace from one, who knows that his own Church is a *far more* heterogeneous body than that which he reflects on. Why upbraid us with little diversities, when you disagree in greater matters? You know that the Conformists are not of one mind, even in the very matter of conformity and imposition. You differ from one another in several acts and modes of public worship: and an impartial stranger must pronounce your *cathedral* and *parochial* to be *different* ways of worship.—And why represent some of our number as the worst of heretics, and as blasphemers of the Saviour and the Holy Spirit, when

* See p. 12.

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you are fully sensible how many there are in your own community, Ministers as well as the Laity, who belong to the same class, and openly publish and glory in their faith. Besides, Sir, can you mention any thing among the Dissenters like what is continually practised with you,—the *profanation of the Lord's Supper*? You must join me, in saying, that the making any religious action a qualification for worldly advantages, is to abuse and profane what is in its own nature sacred.—What an indignity also to the head of the Church, to apply one of his own institutions, for commemorating his dying love to sinners, to the purposes of civil government, and make it a qualification for one thing, which was designed altogether for another, widely different!—moreover, excluding the *conscientious* from it, and forcing the *profligate* to come, that they might have places of riches and honour. Is not this depreciating the person and blood of the Saviour, above any other thing that can be named? I beg leave to put you in mind of what our favourite author, Mr. Howe, said of it.—“*We*

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tremble

tremble to think of the exclusive sacramental test! Are all fit to approach the sacred table, whom the *fear of ruin* or the *hope of gain* may bring thither? 'Tis amazing, that among Christians, so venerable an institution should be prostituted to the serving of so mean purposes, and so foreign to its true end; and that doing it *after the manner* of the Church of England, must be the qualification,—as if England were another Christendom, or it were a greater thing to conform in every punctilio to the rules of the *Church*, than of *Christ* himself *.”

To prevent any of your people from the thought of going over to the Dissenters, for the sake of a more evangelical and acceptable mode of worship, in p. 103, you tell them, that the Dissenters, who *so loudly insist* on the evil of superadding any regulations to those already provided by our Lord and his Apostles, are guilty of prescribing and superadding many particulars themselves. In p. 114,—that they would only give you

* Howe's Life, vol. i. p. 53.

liberty to think as *they think*, and to act as they act, which was no liberty at all. In p. 116,—that they insist on other terms of communion than those which our Lord hath appointed, and therefore you could not officiate as a Minister among them; and in p. 121,—that you cannot *become* a Dissenter, till you are weary of your liberty. In the *same moderate and friendly spirit*, and as a mean to promote candor and benevolence among those, who, though they differ in some things, have one Lord, one faith, and one hope, you even represent some of the Dissenters as so *foolish* and *prejudiced* as not to venture within one of your Churches walls,—and others are so *dastardly* and mean-spirited, who, though they would willingly hear Church Ministers occasionally, are afraid of their Ministers, and therefore absent themselves. The *rich* among us “are not always found the most eminent either for grace or wisdom, and they expect to be consulted, and their judgment followed, by their Ministers, and that the preaching be suited to their taste and sentiment.” p. 134.—Yea, almost

every individual among us, though poor, is so *conceited, spiritually proud, and petulant*, “as to conceive themselves qualified to judge and to guide the Minister, to sift and scrutinize his expressions, and to tell him *how* and *what* he ought to preach *.”

In consequence also of the assumed supreme and unscriptural power, claimed and lodged in the people among us, (p. 131.) and the “*unsanctified spirit* in which it hath been exercised by them,” you tell us, “large societies have been crumbled into separate handfuls †.”—Our people, even the *evangelical* and serious, have no zeal, and “were *not* the most likely to maintain and encourage even but the *little fervor* of religion you possessed, and therefore you rather chose to unite yourself with the people of the Church of England, who in your opinion would ‡.”

Now, Sir, what could any *enemy* say worse, or publish stronger, or that could have a greater tendency to prevent or deter

* p. 132.

† p. 134.

‡ p. 155.

the members of your Church from having any *fellowship* or *dealings* with us; or that could better furnish a backbiter and scoffer with shafts of reproach and calumny, against such despicable *Samaritans*? But, as if it were not enough thus to expose this heterogeneous body, the Dissenters, with their supposed views, spirit, sentiments, and usages, (whether justly or falsely described) to public scorn and contempt,—you thought it also highly proper to *warn the public* as to the views, sentiments, and conduct of their *Ministers*, “written (as you say) in the same moderate and friendly spirit which it hath been my *prayer* and endeavour to preserve, and which might, by the *blessing of the Lord*, be a mean of promoting candor and benevolence *.”

In p. 25, you instruct the world, that there is little more of Christ, or of grace, to be found in the *prayers* of some of our Ministers, than in their *sermons*; and hence rather tauntingly exult, “shall we say it is an advantage to their congregations, that their

* p. 160.

Ministers are not confined to a form of sound words?" In the proper place *, it hath been proved, that even in this, the Dissenters have greatly the advantage over many of the members of the establishment,—because these last hear from some of your Clergy *very little*, if any thing at all, of Christ or of grace, or *very different things* concerning them, than what they read in their prayers. And as you have granted, that your Liturgy is not such a form of sound words, but that 'tis capable of *amendment*, it is an advantage we enjoy over you, in not being confined to use an *unsound form*, or an *imperfect one*, without varying a tittle from it.

But *your chief care* is to instruct and well *guard* the public against the *orthodox* or evangelical Dissenting Ministers. In p. 8, 9, you lament over these, as laying *so much stress* upon circumstantial differences in sentiment, as to prevent the exercise of mutual love and forbearance—as employing their leisure hours to vex and worry you and

* See before, p. 31, 32.

each other with needless disputations and uncharitable censure—as not exercising that moderation, candor, and tenderness, towards you and your brethren, as you say you cheerfully exercise towards us—as *aggressors* in religious controversy, *not content* to stand on the defensive.—And at p. 13, you charge us, as writing books, and making unseasonable declarations in the most solemn occasions of worship, to place you and your brethren in a bad light, and to represent you as almost destitute of common sense, or of common honesty.—In p. 31, you charge us with having that *wrongness of spirit* in maintaining unhappy differences, and with being *so prone* to be as far unlike the established Clergy as we can ;—that hence we depreciate even the very words which our Lord himself hath taught us in prayer ; and *so perverse* are we, that we disuse the Lord's Prayer on no better ground than because retained in the usage of the Church of England.—And, p. 114, you insinuate, that we seek to honour Christ by laying a *great*

stress on matters of doubtful disputation. But all this is light.—In p. 129, you would have your friends to particularly consider “a kind of union or association among the Dissenting Ministers, which hath *a greater effect* than some people are aware of:”—to be sure, a very evil and pernicious effect, and altogether unfriendly to Christian liberty!—for you suggest, that the weight of a *board* of Ministers may be found to be heavier than a *bench* of Bishops *.—In the same page, you “compare our Ministers to a company of soldiers in their exercise, where every one must move in a prescribed line, keep the same pace, and make the like motions with the rest, on pain of being treated as refractory.”—In p. 134, our preaching *must* be suited to the taste and sentiment of the most wealthy Church-members.—And, according to p. 139, we *must* accept a Minister for our pulpit, though of different sentiments, and disapproved by us, if asked to preach by a principal person in the

* p. 130.

congregation.

congregation.—What poor, dastardly, time-serving wretches are the *Dissenting Ministers*! If the above representations were true, I would bid them an *everlasting farewell*, with, O my soul, come not into their secret—and to their assembly, my honour, be not thou united!

Even if your candor will grant that some of us are so faithful as “in our *better hours* to disdain the thought of complying with the caprice of our hearers, or conniving at their faults *; yet you immediately suggest to your readers, that human nature is weak, and we stand in a state of temptation,”—in which, you seem to think, for *want of grace*, we often fall, and give up our integrity †. Nay, there are some among us who are so miserable, either in pocket or spirit, “that, though willing to hear you and other awakened Clergymen, do not, *because they are afraid* of their people ‡.”

In p. 59, you charge us with improperly

* p. 134.

† “If he hath grace to maintain his integrity.”

‡ p. 140.

requiting

requiting the candor and liberality of some of your brethren towards us, in receiving us gladly into their houses,—and with ungenerously attempting to prejudice and perplex their people, and to weaken their hands. If this severe reflection can possibly be applied to any, I apprehend only to two or *three*, at most, of all the approved body of Dissenting Ministers in the cities of London and Westminster and their environs,—and *hard* indeed is *their fate* now ! To shew their Christian liberty and catholicism, and brotherly love, they might frequently attend your houses and your churches, and mingle in your modes of worship ;—and I know they defended themselves in the last practice with, “ O we differ only in points of a circumstantial nature,—these are not of weight enough to prevent our communion together, —we love their zeal, and wish them God-speed, and will encourage them with our presence.”—Many judicious persons thought, there was an apparent inconsistency of walk and conduct with their profession of being *bonâ fide* Dissenters—and that, by their thus
running

running into the *borders* of conformity, they weakened the Dissenting interest,—either drawing away their people with them, or by their example leading all men, their own families and *children* not excepted, to consider the difference between your Church establishment, and a Church founded on the rules of Christ, as merely circumstantial, and so prepared them for a quick and easy apostacy. While thus viewed by most of their own brethren, *you* censure them as coming among you for the sake of gaining popularity, and to prejudice and perplex your people, and weaken your hands; though you exult “the *most judicious* and *spiritual*” are proof against their artful insinuations to forsake you *.”

In p. 143, you say, that “they who are Dissenters upon principle, would act against their judgments and consciences, were they to *conform* for the sake of usefulness;” and add, “I am well content that they should remain as they are.” Probably you think, that they who are Dissenters upon

* See more observations on this, p. 52.

principle,

principle, must also act against their judgments and consciences in conforming to your modes of worship *occasionally*,—especially in visiting you at your houses, for the sake of usefulness, that is popularity, or to draw away your people from you to the Dissenting interest ;—no doubt, therefore, but you would be *well content*, if such persons for the future staid away altogether. I must confess, with you, that this *occasional conformity* doth not appear to produce any good, if we may judge by its fruits and effects either in past or present days. The catholicism seems to be generally evil spoken of, and evil judged, by every party, either as proceeding from an *unstable* and a wavering mind, or a desire to gain persons and money to their party interest, and advance their *own name* and *influence*. If any, however, have reason to be thankful, and to rejoice, in the mean of *trimming*, I think the advantage is much on your side—for *thus*, by the interest of Dissenters, some of your awakened brethren have obtained good lectureships

tureships and livings in the Church; and I could mention even some *deserters* from us, who have owed their preferments, and their very ordination, to their old friends the Dissenters.—Beside, after all the *ungenerous arts* of my brethren who associate with you, you should have acknowledged, that we never *compel* any of your communion to come over to us by any force or bribe, as your superiors do some of ours, by the unrighteous *test act*; nor do we compel any of your communion, and those who never hear us, to contribute to our support *.

In p. 150, we have another severe reproach thrown out, that in “the great and spreading revival of religion which took place, the instruments were *not* Dissenters.” We now also, and for some time past have had, only the *name* and *form*, instead of the reality, spirit, and power.—And, p. 154, our most judicious Ministers have lost a proper animation in their delivery; and in

* See more on this point, p. 60, 61.

the next page, our people have *no zeal*,—they are unlikely to maintain or encourage even but a little fervor of religion,—and their Ministers have but few evident tokens of a power from on high accompanying their public ministrations ; but in the Church of England were the *most* evident tokens.

In p. 48, the Dissenting Ministers are such a class of beings, that you esteem it a remarkable interposition of the providence of God to prevent your being one of them.—And at p. 50, we behold you “*heartily thankful* to the Lord,” for leading you by a way which you knew not, to labour in that part of the vineyard which is separate from them.—What did you intend, brother, that your particular friends, not to say the world, should think of us ?—Why did you, in p. 52, let out the *secret*, and teach us so plainly what you would have them think ?—Truly, we are so bent on *avarice*, or the promotion of a *party*, that behold we question whether *any good* at all is done by the ministrations of the pious Clergy ;—and you

openly say, "would we attach ourselves to the *Dissenting interest*, and could we *persuade our people to follow us*, they would probably no longer doubt whether the Lord had wrought by our Ministry or not." Some of these remarkable words (proofs of that Christian charity in your breast which hopeth all things and thinketh no evil) are contained in the very *same page* with your declaration of "lying low in the dust in the sight of the Lord, conscious of inherent defilement, and that your *best services* need forgiveness."—Your services in this *Apologia* were certainly intended to terrify the serious part of mankind from the least connection with the Dissenting interest; and your many reproaches against us need our forgiveness.—You have mine, without solicitation; and happy shall I be, if these remarks on the spirit and tendency of your Letters, excite you to a suitable acknowledgement, and to the exercise henceforth of that love and friendship which will subsist between the genuine disciples of Christ in a better world.

I will

I will appeal to your own judgment, Sir; can a moderate and impartial person read this *your list of charges and insinuations* against the Protestant Dissenters, Ministers and people, and not immediately think of the list of *famous persons* recorded in Rom. i. 28—31? If you had not the *list* in your eye, 'tis evident that you consider us, and would have all men to view and regard us, as partisans and bigots,—quarrelsome and contentious,—depreciators of even the Saviour's own words, and refusing, because others esteem and use them,—uncharitable, refusing to others that liberty which we claim for ourselves,—impious, through avarice or envy deniers of the real work of God in the souls of men,—ungrateful, factious, implacable.—*In brief*, we are altogether destitute of that *love* which the Gospel of Christ enjoins, and which every real Christian feels the power of, and cherishes in his breast.—Happy for us! that we made no subscriptions, nor took any oaths at our ordination or institution, or else *covenant-breakers* might have been added to the

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the list, and other epithets ; but there are *full enough* now to finish our character, if credited. Yet surely, some instances ought to have been given in proof of our very evil spirit and conduct, at the time you laid us thus before the public. However, 'tis our consolation, that none but the exceedingly weak and credulous will believe a thing to be true, merely because one man, though a Gamaliel, said it. Few of our people will go out from among us, though you set them an example twenty years past ; and, after every artifice that can be named or devised, still there will be a *large remnant* preserved, who will not fail to examine their religious principles, and modes in worship, by the Sacred Oracles, be steadfast, and conscientiously retain them, with us.

Permit me, *after this review*, to ask you ; or rather, after collecting together the several insinuations, sneers, charges, and accusations contained in your four letters,—and which your own memory can do better than any person for you, — pray ask yourself, “ Understood I the meaning of my own words in p. 140, when I said, I write *only* on the
O *defensive* ? ”

defensive?” You cannot shew, I apprehend, any divine commission, granting you an extraordinary indulgence, or exclusive privilege to use hard names, or to throw about reproaches, or to promote a party, more than any other Minister of Christ. Have you not really bestowed on your dissenting brethren some harsh censures, unbecoming your profession? Is the way you have taken, the most suitable one to obviate prejudices, and to prevent or abate the unhappy effects of a party spirit?—Can a large number of your paragraphs be styled the language of a moderate and friendly spirit—or be reconciled with your alleged desire, that “while we live here, we should be at peace among ourselves, and live in the spirit of that love (the only infallible mark of our being truly the servants of Christ) which seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, but beareth, hopeth, and believeth all things *?” Consider, whether that love, which is the discriminating characteristic of the religion of Jesus, is to be found in your *Apolo-*

gia in that degree of exercise as to satisfy yourself, not to say candid observers, that your spirit and language truly bear *his mark*.

As you have frequently boasted of the *liberty* you enjoy in your Church ; and your *second reason* for not being a Dissenter, was, “ because you highly valued the right of *private judgment*, and your *liberty* as a *man* and a *Christian*,” I will conclude my present correspondence with a brief account of the *liberty* which I enjoy in these respects as a *Dissenter*, and of which you as a *Churchman* are deprived.

I can assure you, brother, I neither at ordination nor institution was forced to *bow my knees* before a Lord Bishop, or any other ecclesiastical superior ; and had *no fees to pay* to any person whatever at my admission into the service of Christ in his Church.—I had no *articles* of human device to *subscribe*, imposed by civil authority upon me as the true and Christian doctrine, before I could enter the Church to speak in the name and on the behalf of the Lord Jesus—nor was I constrained to *assent* and *consent* to a book of

prayers, ceremonies, and rules, *ex animo*, which is allowed, by the most sensible and pious of your own community, to contain many things very exceptionable and unscriptural, and that ought to be expunged. — I was under *no temptation* to court the favour of any *Patron* for the exercise of my pastoral office ; nor was I thrust in among the people to whom I minister, or appointed to the care of their souls without their knowledge or approbation, by any person whatever ; but had the happiness of being their free choice, according to the right they enjoyed in nature and conscience, and which was exercised by the primitive Christians so early as the days of the Apostles.

I was not obliged to *swear true and canonical obedience* to any man living, much less to his successors, as a condition of being suffered to preach the Gospel,—nor did I ever acknowledge the ability of any man to give the Holy Ghost unto me, to qualify me for the service ; nor did I pretend to receive it from any man, much less a *commission* to forgive and retain the sins of those to whom I minister,

minister, and of any other persons whatsoever.

I was *not compelled*, within two months after my induction, to read thirty-nine Articles of religion, and make a *public declaration* of my *unfeigned assent* to them, though containing many things of doubtful disputation among the very heads of your Church,—as was you, and as are all your Clergy, on pain of *deprivation* * ;—nor have I one hundred and forty-one canons, or even *one*, to read any Sabbath of the year to my people, whether I like them or not ;—but there are some you are obliged to read, which confessedly reflect on the headship of Christ, and the sufficiency of scripture ; and others pour forth excommunications against those who cannot in conscience conform to the establishment, because they take the word of God only, for the rule of their faith and worship.—I am *free* from pronouncing these or any other anathemas against my brethren and fel-

* *Volumes* have been written by the Clergy in search of the proper original sense of the articles, as well as to ascertain their present meaning and benefit.

low faints ;—and, Sir, *I can wear* what garments I please, either in my own house or the house of God, without any compulsive order, or restraint, or censure from ecclesiastical rulers or superiors.

No *orders* from Right Reverend Lord Archbishops, or Lord Bishops, Deans, or Archdeacons, or any Spiritual Court Officers, have any claim or binding influence upon me. *I am at liberty*, both as a man and a Christian, from the observation of a number of unprofitable festivals and fasts, vigils and eves, which you are constrained to observe, as you would be found faithful to your promise and your superiors : and I can *ad libitum* direct my face to worship my God towards the West, the North, and the South, as well as the East.

I can indulge scrupulous consciences with receiving the memorials of our Lord's body and blood in *any posture* they think to be most scriptural, instead of being forced to deny it, as you are, to all who will not receive it kneeling before a supposed altar ;—and *I can use* such words at the distribution,

as

as have no tendency to countenance transubstantiation or superstition.—*I also am free of the great snare and evil of carrying or giving the sacrament (as the Lord's Supper is called) to the sick in private, or on their death-beds, and prostituting a church ordinance as a viaticum or private passport for a soul to heaven.*

I am under *no constraint* as to the persons with whom I shall have communion at the table of the Lord :—I know all who come unto it, and am under *no fear* of being prosecuted in a court of law for refusing to give it to disorderly and ungodly persons.—I am not *compelled* to prostitute the *sacred ordinance* to a *civil* purpose, or to use it as a *distinguishing test of parties*, a wall of partition between Christians,—or to give it as a qualification to any and every man, as a means of barter for their enjoying the posts, profits, and honours of a secular establishment.—I am *free* from degrading the dignity of the divine institution into a mere civil ceremony, and laying it open and in com-

mon to either the profligate or the unprincipled.

I can admit parents, Sir, not only to be present at their children's baptism, but to devote their children unto God, the great parent of all,—and can charge them in their own persons to undertake the religious education of their infant offspring, according to their bounden duty;—and I have no part in *your fore evil* of ordering them to procure sureties and gossips, and then making these persons to promise for the child what they do not and cannot perform for themselves; which I must know also they consider, at the very time, only as a matter of form and ceremony; as 'tis too notorious, that the greatest part of the sureties never trouble themselves about the child any more, or if they did, could never faithfully discharge the trust so formally and unscripturally delegated to them.

I am *not obliged*, in the baptism of children, to make a cross on the child's forehead, *in token* of what he is afterwards to do, or rather,

ther, *in conformity* to the corrupt Church of Rome, from whose liturgy much of your service is borrowed. Nor am *I constrained* to tell the parents and sureties of every child I baptize (what few awakened clergy can believe to be really true) that by the baptism it is *regenerated*,—and then in solemn prayer, give unto God also my most hearty thanks “that it hath pleased him to regenerate the infant with his Holy Spirit, and receive him for his own child by adoption; and that he is made partaker of the death of his Son.”

I am not under the *necessity*, as you are in the duty of catechising, to *teach* the children as they grow up, whether good or bad, vicious or serious, to believe and to say, (what the holy scriptures rather gainsay) that “in baptism they were made members of Christ, and children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.”—The above particulars, respecting Baptism and the Lord’s supper, yourself being judge, are likely to be, and have been often, attended with *dangerous consequences*, quieting and lulling
asleep

asleep the consciences of men on a false foundation.

And what shall I say as to your order for the visitation of the sick,—What is *your liberty* in this respect?—I thank God, I am at liberty to converse and *pray* with the sick and dying, as may seem most suitable to my own mind and their circumstances,—and should they, through superstition and priestcraft, connected with inward terror, be induced to ask from me *absolution*; instead of pronouncing what you are enjoined to do, *I can tell them*, that the Lord Jesus left no power to his Ministers or Servants in his Church to absolve sinners,—and that I had no authority committed to me to absolve them from any one of their sins, but they must look up to heaven, and the God of mercies alone, for that blessing, through the Son of his love.

I rejoice, as a Dissenter, in being at liberty, and delivered also from the *snare* and *imposition* of declaring my sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life, and the salvation of, *all I bury in the grave*,—and *am*
not

not forced to give God hearty thanks for taking away some persons out of the world, whose lives were precious and valuable, and their deaths much to be regretted by their families and society,—nor am *I obliged to say*, it was an act of God's great mercy in taking to himself the souls of persons to whose life I was an utter stranger, or perhaps knew it to have been without Christ in the world, and who died, it may be, in the act of drunkenness, or of blasphemy, or by their own hands, or in a duel with a neighbour ; —and yet you must pray God also, that when yourself shall depart out of this life, you may rest in Christ, as your hope is that your (unknown or wicked) brother doth.—You cannot believe, that God of his great mercy takes to himself the souls of all those whose bodies are privileged with your canonical burial.

Besides the *great difference* betwixt you and me, and *our liberty* as men and Christians in the forecited particulars, others might be added—as the fulsome compliments
and

and adulation, and the unjust epithets given to dead princes, and sometimes to living ones, and others, which *you are obliged* publicly to present to God on the 30th of January, the 29th of May, and other occasions, &c.—but the few I have selected, I think, fully evince what a *high value* you set on the *right* of private judgment, in uniting with the establishment, and becoming a Minister in the Church of England—and how *justly* you can exult over Dissenters, in possessing more than they, *that liberty*, which as men we ought to enjoy, and to which as Christians our Lord and his Gospel call us.

Be ye happy!—I would not change states with you, for all your present superiority as to a *good living*, independent of the people. I cannot join a Church, no not for all her emoluments, which hath such a worldly complexion, — whose canons, constitutions, orders, and officers, derive their force, *not from Christ*, but from acts of parliament and the King's sanction.—The very power of ordination, exercised by your Bishops,
is

is entirely from the King, only from his commission; and you well know how they themselves are chosen and appointed.

I am content with ministering to a people so collected, as that indeed the eleventh canon of your Church allows us to be a *true* and *lawful Church*, notwithstanding your leaving, and now assailing us; and we are a *true Church* also, according to the definition given of one in your nineteenth article. But to the Word and Testimony must be our great appeal. The things in which I differ from you, as a member of the established Church, are those in which I apprehend you differ from Christ. If there be, from Scripture, room for difference among serious professors, your ecclesiastical rulers should not pretend to settle religion *better* than our Lord and his Apostles did; nor should they impose those rites in the worship of God, which they perfectly well know neither the head of the Church, nor his immediate followers, and the first Christians, ever used.—But they *assume* also a right of multiplying the number of articles and of ceremonies, as well

as

as to impose those that are at present in fashion. — However, to your own master you stand or fall.

When I began to read your letters, I had not the least intention to pen an answer: —the contents and spirit of them, have drawn these remarks from me. — Should they, contrary to my wish, raise me an opponent, and give occasion to you, or any friend, to answer, I shall duly consider it, and be ready, by reply or some other way, to render justice to you, to myself, and to our cause. — My desire is, that brotherly love may continue. — I am inclined to think, that your letters were written in some *gloomy* and discontented hour; and hope that the severity with which you have treated your former good friends the Dissenters, will be now exchanged for a far warmer friendship and esteem than ever. I assure you, my spirit is moderate and *friendly*; and far would I be from rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but rather pour forth blessings, were they at my disposal, on those who from their hearts excommunicate and curse me.

If we cannot be persuaded to agree in some things, let us not bite and devour one another. You are safe as to temporals, in all events,—the discouragements are on my side ; but let *my lot* be what it may, my resolution is to follow the great author and finisher of our faith, if it be through evil report or greater sufferings, till we meet in his kingdom of glory, and join in the same songs of love, and of praise to him who redeemed us with his blood. To his mercy and blessing

I commend you ; and remain

Your affectionate friend.

June 24th, 1784.

F I N I S.

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